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IIAS REVIEW

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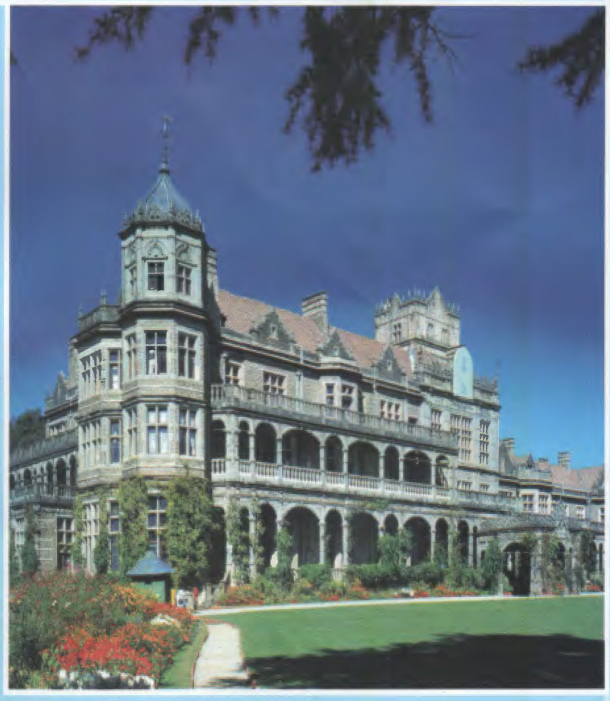

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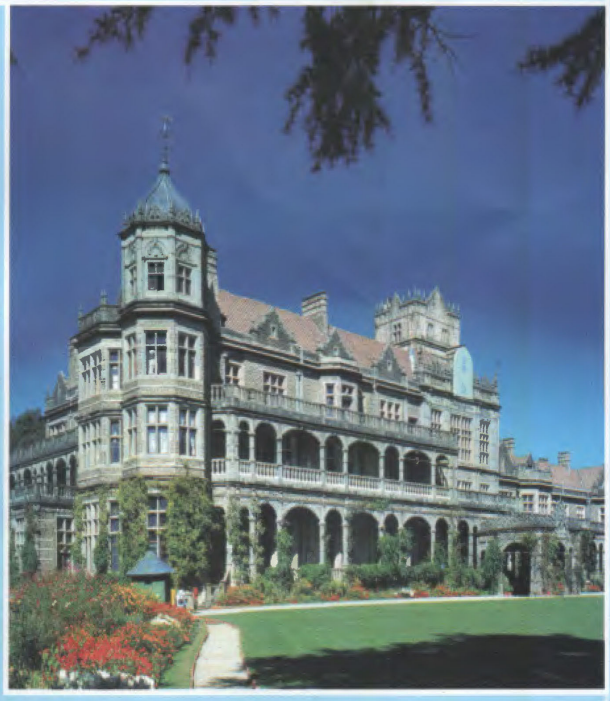

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Editorial

It is difficult to present Indian literature as a unitary and unified category as India is a microcosm of many languages and literary cultures that have resisted the centralizing imperatives of a nation-state. Our creativity has been dialogic, and our literary discourse marked by the negotiation of a necessary heterogeneity, advancing a conception of identity that lives through difference and hybridity. The spirit of multilingual and multi-religious India embodies the civilizational unity of India, not, of course, in the sense in which it was posited by the orientalist scholarship and which subsequently became synonymous with a regressive cultural nationalism. The Sahitya Akademi of India underlines this concern with the essential unity of India with its credo that Indian literature is one though written in many languages. At the same time it rejects the claim that a nation-state should act as the authority to legitimise 'literature' or legislate on it.

During the colonial period the British had sought to standardize India's diverse literary culture under the Western eyes. The orientalist literary historiography made selective appropriations of our past to frame them in their own conceptions of national literature equating Indian literature with the high textuality of Sanskrit marginalising the various Indian vernaculars (or more appropriately, the *bhashas*) many of which have millennia-long traditions. When Raymond Schwab spoke about a second 'Oriental' Renaissance in the West, it was also done with a view to privilege the classical languages of the Orient.

The colonial period was also marked by the claims of western modernity to represent itself through English (part of the baggage of the *mission civilatrice*). Many of the Indian nationalist leaders who led the freedom movement were bilingual and communicated to the masses in their own languages. In the north, in particular, Hindi and Urdu became vehicles of anti-colonial resistance. One cannot, however, completely dismiss the western influences. We can, for instance, clearly find the effects of western trends in the historical romances in Malayalam, Tamil and Marathi. Chandu Menon, author of an early Malayalam novel *Indulekha*, had as his model Benjamin Disrraeli's now forgotten novel *Henrietta Temple*. However, it will not be quite wide of the mark to maintain that it is in their own languages that the Indian writers found their métier. One may recall how Michael Madhusudan Dutt, after publishing his verse initially in English and emulating Scott or Byron, wrote his magnum opus the *Meghanadbadh Kavya* in Bangla. Bankimchandra Chatterjee, after writing his first novel *Rajmohan's Wife* in English, soon switched to his mother tongue for his creative writing. Even the English writings of Indian writers like Raja Rao carry the unmistakable flavour of a regional language. Mark how *Kanthapura* carries the distinctive cadence of Kannada.

English, the language of the 'Cosmopolis', (a term popularised by Sheldon Pollock) is everywhere (and therefore homeless) and has emerged as the privileged site for a pan-Indian outlook problematizing the role of the *bhashas*. Salman Rushdie sounds like a latter- day Macaulay when he insists that it is only the Indian Writing in English that represents the Indian creative urge and not the literatures in Indian languages. The sweeping generalization betrays an ignorance of the vast corpus of our literature in the *bhashas*.

The conceptual tools of the majority of our Anglophile critics are hardly adequate to grasp the cultural nuances of works in various Indian languages. Unfortunately, the pan-Indian writing in English asserts its hegemonic role as it assumes the mantle of cosmopolitan exchange. Since English in India relates to fewer registers, there is a greater pull for homogenization and essentialising of reality through erasure of differences, or reducing the pluralities to a conflated idea of Indianness as a theme or worldview. Whereas a writer like Raja Rao can successfully integrate myth and history, realism with fabulation, through the medium of English, in most other writers, there is always an obsessive desire for, what Meenakshi Mukherjee has

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called, 'The Anxiety of Indianness.' The *bhasha* writers, on the other hand, do not have to wear the badge of authenticity to declare their Indianness, which they take for granted, nor do their readers ever question it. The postcolonial discourse may have been expedient politically or as a critical methodology but it has also been presented as an exclusionary category in relation to the 'third world literature' as it tends to subsume the several distinctive voices emerging from various locations.

In this issue of *Summerhill: IIAS Review* we shift our focus to the writings from Indian languages, in particular, the fictional works in Hindi, Urdu, Oriya, Kannada, Bangla, Malayalam, Punjabi, Assamese, Gujarati and Marathi. We believe that our postcolonial condition finds its most authentic expression in the works of Indian languages, which through a complex of cultural negotiation have evolved their 'alternative modernities,' which question or redeploy the values of the modern West from the perspectives of so-called pre-modern societies. Literary and cultural texts play a major role in this revisionary exercise. It is hoped that the readers will be led to more texts from the rich repertoire of Indian languages.

Satish C. Aikant

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Narrating Life : Krishna Sobti's *Zindaginama*

JASBIR JAIN

Zindaginama is a narrative which though published in 1979, has a history going back as far as 1952 and coming right up to the present. It has had a constant grip on Sobti's imagination as well as on the reader who goes back to it time and again. It was in 1952 that the young Sobti submitted a manuscript of five hundred pages to Leader Press, Allahabad. Two years later, unable and unwilling to accept the editorial changes, she withdrew it after making due compensatory payment to the publisher.[1] It is this manuscript which several years later and several novels later surfaced as *Zindaginama Pahla Bhag* : *Zinda Rukh* obviously intended to be a two-part novel. The second part has now made an appearance in *Katha-Desh* October, 2010 as a short narrative written in the form of a letter and taking the story forward to the thirties of the twentieth century. It has stayed with the writer and haunted her imagination all these years. And in the intervening period it has overflowed its boundaries, in every possible way defying all normal expectations from a novel in its form of narration, embrace of history and its hold on the unconscious minds of a people as they are impacted by external reality. It is difficult to hold it within any single definition. The distance between the familiar and the unfamiliar is merged. Images conjunct and haunt us, metaphors rise out of its pages to evoke memories and to acquire new meanings.

Zindaginama announces by its very title, its intention to write a chronicle of life. How does one capture, narrate or organise character/nature of life itself? And if it is the protagonist, where do we locate the centrality of the narration? Other similar questions come up with references to identity, subjectivity and relationships. There is no way that there can be a beginning and an end: the narrative has to begin in the middle and end in midstream. Prefaced by two defining epigraphs it delineates a purpose and a line of action. The first of these is a short one which distinguishes between official history and people's history. The records of the rulers freeze history while in the people's minds it flows continuously, fluidly, and indifferent to the banks, it spreads its waters over unknown and unfathomed pasts. The image of the stream flowing is a defining one in the construct of this space-time continuum as the flow marks no clear divisions between the past, the present and the future. The margins can simply not be marked – there are many subterranean levels. The second epigraph is also a poem but a much longer one and it builds an atmosphere of an intense relationship to the land. There is an abundance of maternal metaphors which locate the land in geographical space and in its produce as it moves on to foreground its vibrant masculinity. Ensuing pages are a description of the festivals, the celebratory elements of folk culture leading to the final moment of dislocation when a parting has to take space. This move is different from all earlier dislocations, caused by the many invasions of the land for this is a shifting of the ground from beneath their feet. The rehabilitation process, marked by the subtitle *Zinda Rukh* is again a difficult reconciliation with the truncated reality and a new terrain. In this second epigraph, one realises retrospectively, lies the defining plan of the narrative. I use the term 'narrative' as the term 'novel' fails to do justice to it. Though the writer herself has used the word 'upanyas' on a couple of occasions. *Zindaginama* covers a time span of a little more than a decade in early twentieth century even as it moves further back into the past in its reference to bygone years and past histories. The two defining political moments are the Bengal partition of 1905 and the recruitment drive for the First World War in 1913-1914.[2] The partition of 1947 is nowhere on the horizon. But it is in the epigraph and indicates the origins of *Zindaginama* which lie in the historically inherited memory of an irrecoverable past. To that extent *Zindaginama* is both a celebration and an elegy, which

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has set itself the task of reconstructing the past while it can still be salvaged.

The second half of the title 'nama' literally meaning a chronicle, calls for an absent author or free-floating narrative, and perhaps a centre constantly in flux geared to the moment even as it moves into the second wave. Variously used by kings and gurus and storytellers, it lends itself easily to a collective voice and facilitates a broad canvas and a constant negotiation between the external and the internal, and if the narrative demands, between the individual and community as well as between subjectivity and objectivity. In the main a chronicle with epic dimensions, a nama belongs as much to narratives of belonging as of exodus. History has records of *Baburnama*, *Zafarnama*, *Akbarnama* and in our own times we have Allan Sealy's *The Trotter Nama* which traces the history of Anglo-Indians across centuries.[3]

The period between the withdrawal of the 1952 *Channa* and 1979 *Zindaginama* literally meaning *The Saga of Life*, did not lie fallow. Sobti wrote several novellas, novels and short stories during this period. Were they in anyway related to *Zindaginama* or fragments of it, or similar attempts to capture the past? Perhaps one can view two of these as explorations which are related. *Daar se Bichudi* (1958) is about war, dislocations and rehabilitations. The title literally means 'separated from the clan' but it has also been translated as *Memory's Daughter* (Katha 2008). The other is *Dilo-Danish* (1993), which is located in Delhi of the early decades of the twentieth century, uses Urdu of those times and is the story of Vakil Saheb and his two families, one legitimate with Kutumb ruling over the household and the other illegitimate, set in his mistress Mehak's cramped apartment. The connection with *Zindaginama* is perceptible at several levels – the use of the oral tradition and folk forms, the engagement with history and tradition and the rehabilitation necessitated by dislocation. Sobti's anthology of selected excerpts, *Sobti Ek Sobhbat* (1989) has some extracts under the title '*Zindaginama* – Kucch Aprakashit Ansh'. These extracts, at some point of time, found their way into *Dilo-Danish*, was it the writer's intention to consider the earlier narrative's migration to Delhi? Sobti is silent on this point but she is very vocal about her creative process both in *Shabdon Ke Alok Mein* (2005) and *Sobti-Vaid, Ek Samvaad* (Sobti-Vaid: A Dialogue), (2007)

Sobti-Vaid, Ek Samvaad reflects on the writer's intellectual preoccupations with time and history, and the ensuing process of living simultaneously in three different time frames: the present, the flow of past with its still points that surface back to life through recollection and the combined flow of these two into an unseen future. The originary perhaps is not identifiably locatable. The Derridean concept of difference is likely to offer help in understanding this three-fold flow of time. 'Differance' as Mark Currie, has observed, is a counter-strategy against 'the linearity of narrative and metaphysics of presence'.[4] If the sign signifies a structure of exclusion, then differance reflects its internal divisions. It questions the erasure of difference caused by definite meaning and location. Derrida's argument is based on his questioning of structuralism, my use of it is to extend it to a flow between the processes of contextualisation and decontextualisation and further to question both the closure implied by structure and the containment implied by calendar time as Sobti's epigraphs to *Zindaginama* do. Sobti's use of folk forms and the process of embedment of performative forms serves a similar purpose. Folk customs, festival celebrations, riddles, lullabies all represent a 'moment' in its continuity, not in its fixity. Agyeya, in his Samvatsar lectures 'Memory and Time' and 'Memory and Country' also uses the concept of space-time continuum, but Agyeya's meaning is somewhat different. The two lectures are connected both in their concepts and concerns. Agyeya foregrounds memory and defines it as the existential world of all reality, its perspectives and its expressions in language: 'The time we live in, the time which lives in us, both are parts of that natural perception; we feel this natural flow of both in each part of our body. We perceive the continuity of our existence (even though it is a continuity that changes every moment): 'We were, we are'... .(207).

In *Sobti-Vaid Samvaad*, both Krishna Sobti and Krishan Baldev Vaid dwell on their individual creative experiences and evolving patterns. Vaid in his treatment of time discusses *Guzra Hua Zamana* while Sobti chooses to focus on *Zindaginama* where she feels that it is more than a personal journey into the past, it is a collective one, a journey engaged in a constant negotiation between the decisions and the differences of the past and also concerned with capturing the memories of an unrecoverable past of a land left behind. *Zindaginama* was not written from personally lived memory but from a memory which was inherited and it attempts to capture the past, 'peeche chut gayi dharti ke mizaaz ko, rakh-rikhav, jeevan-shaili aur sanskritic tapman aur bhashia shabdsampda...'[6]

It is this linguistic wealth which evokes memories and is embedded in local usage and custom. As the narrative unfolds itself, a series of loosely clustered meetings, happening, moments used as atmospheric conducts come into play. Nearly all of them are folk forms and use oral tradition. Sobti uses the typical Punjabi word *pind* and not the Hindi word *gaon*. The cattle are returning from the fields, and the hearth fires are lit as the men come home. The aroma of the cooking fills the air as the birds too fly homewards. The centrality of the 'home', the

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relationship with nature, the untoward linked to destiny complete this beginning and define the subject of this 'nama', which is the community caught up in the daily rituals but also enveloped by the mystic and the religious and conscious of the unknown future. Right at the beginning the act of storytelling is foregrounded when the children clamour for a story, '*Lalaji kahani*, *Lalaji bujhartein*, *Lalaji koi kissa*'. Storytelling is very different from a written narrative. It constantly summons the attention of the listener and demands a response, an *hunkara*, and this dialogic session may often be interrupted by wonder and questions. It offers space both for learning and for teaching and the interaction has its own psychological aspects in its communicative strategies and the community that it builds with the listeners. The act of telling embraces some aspects of performance. In a recent article, 'Knowledge, Fluid Cultures and Frozen Structures', Kapila Vatsayan prioritises the spoken word 'Vak' above the written the *logos*.[7] But Sobti despite deriving her inspiration from the spoken word, believes language in itself is not the only spark of a writer's creative impulse. The deeper meaning of words has to be recognized and they have to be viewed with 'detachment and passion — that acts like a critical force to weave the ideas into the text. . . .'(Some Thoughts on Writing, Partition and *Zindaginama*, 22).

Corresponding to the image of history as a flow in time, the oral narrative also has a tendency to break bank, flow into an expanse of land, collect silt and re-form itself to yield a fresh harvest at every stage. When events from the distant past are narrated, they are referred to as 'mashoor kissa ho guzra hai', a sentence difficult to translate for both the tense and the words can be handled in different ways and 'guzra' has several connotations. Time passes, people pass by and they also pass away and 'a well-known event had happened' or 'had taken place' or the simpler and more direct, 'Once upon a time this had happened'; 'long ago this took place'. One can keep on adjusting the active and the passive voice and try other combinations but both 'kissa' and 'guzra' carry heavy cultural meanings and evoke certain emotions. The word 'kissa' also implies a continuity, a retelling and a keeping alive. Kissas have a habit of turning into legends transmitted orally and variously until they surface in writing (which may also have several different versions). Punjab has its own share of legends and tales of romance and courage. Interestingly enough when oral narratives such as *Heer Ranjha* or *Sohni-Mahiwal* are transferred into written versions, they find a way back into oral transmission when people sing them.

In an article '*Srijan Ke Alok*' (*Katha-Desh* Oct. 2010), Sobti observes that creativity is a combination of a multitude of memories and association which persistently knock at the mind of the writer until the writer is ready to delve into this mysterious unknown.[8] For Sobti the creative act is not sudden or self-contained triggered off by an isolated event. It has to be born of some memory or association which keeps on drawing her in, into unknown depths and the creative act is likened to the process of extraction. This partly explains her lifelong fascination with *Zindaginama*, with history and collective memory and with the past. *Zindaginama* is an 'imagined' past not one which the author has experienced but it has been culled out of its presence in language, in rituals, in tales oft told and memories passed on by one generation to another. These rituals and practices become conjunction points in the narrative structure. At times the moral or religious concepts governing their origins may be absent, or they may have turned secular over a period of time, but when in actual practice they bring people together and are open to a re-questioning Lalli Shah's innocent queries are a good example of this kind of questioning as is the questioning in the majlis. Social rituals which are participatory and draw people into an intimacy provide an open space. But religious rituals are more private and draw their own boundaries. *Zindaginama* concerns itself with social rituals which allow interaction, often act as a therapy, mark shifts in life, express emotions and help the participants to overcome their inhibitions. Performances like masquerades and swangs, of which there are several in *Zindaginama*, enable historical reviewing and social critiquing.

Lullabies, kaafis (verses) from Bulle Shah, Abdul Lateef and Waris Shah, Lohri songs all bring people together. The ceremony of a child's being initiated into school-going is directed at teaching humility and respect. It is against this setting that the narrative spreads itself to encompass the past with all its conflicts and complexities as well as the living vibrations of rural life in Punjab. Its multi-layered strands refuse to be contained within the actual time of the story. Movements in and out are many and reach out to other centres, historical events, political records, Anglo-Sikh wars, the reforms or indifference of Mughal Emperors, migrations to other lands and family feuds. There are many centres. First the village community, within it the Shah family, within it the Shahji-Rabiyan relationship, restrained and unexpressed. Other centres are the village *majlis*, where men get together and the young girls' *trinjan* when, on the threshold of adulthood, they get together for a night-long vigil, singing and spinning, teasing each other, trying to gain the confidence of others and articulating their own shy, half-awakened desires. This is a ritualistic goodbye to their girlhood and they have already begun to think nostalgically about it. It is through such centres that the emotional and historical journeys are marked.

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One needs to ask whether the world of *Zindaginama* is real or idyllic especially when the language used is very poetic. For instance the word *succha* meaning pure, unused or untouched is used alike for courtyard – '*aangan succha hai*' (18), for darkness – '*succha andhera*' (23) and also for beauty – *'succha roop'* (35). *Sajra* or *sajri* meaning fresh is used for tears – *sajri rulai* (44) for new motherhood – *sajrian maian'*(37) as well as for the sight of a friend which is compared to an early dawn – *sajri dhoop* (43). Each line holds the reader's attention, wishing her to proceed slowly and to establish a friendship in easy stages. In after years Sobti put down some notes on *Zindaginama*. In 'Chand Notes *Zindaginama* Par' (A Few Notes on *Zindaginama*) while explaining the origins of the writing, she moves further back to capture the fullness of loss, briefly and dramatically: '*Ek Waqt. Ek peedi. Ek khatra*. *Ek tootan*. *Ek teedkan. Ek trasdy'*. (*Sobti Ek Sohbat*, 1989). (A time. A generation. A danger. A crumbling. A fracturing. A tragedy). Not a personal tragedy but one which took the whole area and its people in its embrace. Sobti then proceeds to describe the partition riots, the corpse-laden trains filled with their silence, the exodus with the refugees straggling in long caravans with smell of the land left behind still lingering in their nostrils and mixing with the tears in their eyes. Then another arrival, another rehabilitation and a new tree takes root, justifying the subtitle of this first volume – *Zinda Rukh*.[9]

Returning to the earlier question – whether it is real or not – one finds an answer in its living, humming and bustling community with all its economic and emotional pressures, domestic strife, invasions, and migrations, political histories and colonial impositions. These references go as far back to Mohammed Gauri's invasion and mark the present with a reference to the bomb thrown at the Viceroy in Chandni Chowk. Lord Curzon invites criticism for his luxurious lifestyle and the stirrings of rebellion against the British are felt. The government is referred to as '*randi* sarkar', wayward and rudderless.[10]

In these inroads into other histories and other pasts, a space-time expansion takes place and various dialects and languages live side by side moving comfortably between Persian and Urdu and Punjabi and between the literary and the colloquial. The role the mirasis play in this expansion of the narrative is extremely significant. It is they who through their performances and songs, transmit history across generations. Their 'swangs' (satirical pretend games) and masquerades along with their question-answer sessions recall the past to public memory. Through their performances and pretend-games, they take on the role of objective narrators. Similarly in the majlis as the past is recounted and connected with the present, the reliability and veracity of past events is questioned as there are no eye-witness accounts (358). Shahji feels that it is a legitimate question and his response to it is in tune with the first epigraph of *Zindaginama*. History works at more than one level. There are the official records and then there is the people's memory kept alive by retellings in the oral tradition and the varying accounts of the mirasis. In 'Chand Notes *Zindaginama* Par', Sobti elaborates on this by taking the same happening and giving first the account of the vanquished (again an unusual step, for normally histories present the victor's version) , then the oral tradition followed by the official record. To this she adds a fourth in the form of a document, a letter written by Maharani Zinda to Henry Lawrence, the British Resident. This is followed by a majlis, a meeting of the village community where the subject again surfaces. The oral tradition is also represented in two different forms, one a *swang*, and then through a loosely constructed song by children. It is this multiplicity of perspectives and narration which *Zindaginama* uses to its advantage.

The Shah family with its land and power remains at the centre of the narrative. Shahji's younger brother Kashi Shah is religiously inclined and is a man of peace. Shahji's wife is childless and proceeds to pilgrim centres praying for the gift of a child. Lalli is born and Rabiyan comes to the house both as a sibling and a nurse maidto look after Lalli. Rabiyan is young, pretty and innocent. And she falls in love with Shahji who is restrained and conscious of the age gap. But Shahni is disturbed. Kashi Shah advises his sister-in-law to seek peace within her own mind through meditation, a cure which men have always recommended to women. But the love grows and Rabiyan sings of her desires guised in Bulle Shah's kaafi.

Nan mein behayi, nan kanwari
per beta god khilaunyungi
Ek duna achraj gaoongi
Mein pyara yaar manaungi

(Neither married, nor unmarried
I shall nurse a child in my lap
And achieve another miracle
Beseech my dear beloved).[4] (my translation)

But the very shadowness of this love, hovering in the wings, in itself becomes a reason for letting it be. Nobody dare question it.

It is in this context as through the lives of the other women in the village, that the patriarchal character of this society surfaces time and again. While the hierarchy in social power is defined by caste, power and property, man-woman relationships work through familiar models of masculinity and femininity. The women covering their head is only one of the symbols of subordination. But a

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woman's life is subjected to other forms of control – respectability, surveillance, lack of privacy and lack of choice. In fact adulthood is denied to women except if they happen to be of the lower caste and perform other people's domestic chores. Sons come home from the wars to murder their mother's lover while male promiscuity goes unpunished and bigamous relationships end up embittering women's lives. The life of a woman is meant to follow the laid down pattern – marriage, motherhood and the rest whether it brings happiness and security or not is nobody's concern. It is Sobti's portrayal of these relationships and her realistically capturing characters like Chachi Mehri, Lal Bibi, Shano, Baghuti, Pyari, Bebe, Dhanidei, the two Shahnis and Rabiyan that roots this world in its rural environment.

In how many ways can one approach this novel? It spills over in different directions, each one of them asking for independent attention. But the Shah household does not yield its centre. The long-awaited Part-II has not yet appeared, but in October 2010, as mentioned earlier, a fragment has appeared in *Katha-Desh* under the title *Zindaginama-Do*. Set in Samvat 1988, it recalls the period of the early 1930s (of the Gregorian calendar). This fragment is in the form of a letter, as dense in its implications as Vakil Sahib's will in *Dilo-Danish*. Written by Shahni (Shahji's wife and Lalli's mother), it begins after a gap of some years. Apparently both the Shah brothers are no more, Lalli is also dead as his wife, Lochan. We are not told how this all has happened but Shahani is left with the task of bringing up her granddaughter Channa and hostile relatives are clamouring for control over this household which lacks a male head. The letter is addressed to Channa's maternal grandparents and requests their help in the form of some legal advice. Channa's right to inheritance is at stake and her life is also in danger. The crack in the joint family is an uncanny harbinger of the Partition. The letter disturbs one, it leaves long-silence for us to listen to, if we can. One is possessed by a strange foreboding. Unable to bear it, I approached the writer for help. Lalli, it seems, as he was returning from the city after having won a case and engrossed in thoughts of his childhood and Rabiyan, is murdered by his enemies. Lochan had died in childbirth. Is Channa going to get her inheritance? Or is it going to be a dislocation? *Zindaginama-Do* is intended to be an urban narrative – another generation, another setting but the life (zindagi) flows on. A different culture comes into being, layering the earlier one.[11]

While in the village Shahni tries hard to continue the earlier traditions of a wholesome, open education. The maulvi teaches Channa Urdu, and the priest from the Gurudwara inducts her into learning Gurumukhi. Music is being taught and a harmonium has been sent for. Shahni's attempt at saving the past, apparently is under threat. The confluence of cultures, likewise, is moving towards divisions. The thirties was a period of that kind. Shahni's sense of powerlessness, her distrust of her relatives, the feeling of insecurity, of isolation and dependency are all very familiar (I recall the experiences of my own maternal grandmother who was widowed early and left with asix-month old girl child) and are passed on to the reader. Where have all the swangs and gossip sessions gone? Where the free exchange of the majlis and the women's friendship?

The beginnings of this extract or fragment hark back to the ending of *Zindaginama* : *Pahla Bhag*, which ends with Shah Jahan handing over his power to Chhaju Bhagat in exchange for medical help. It reflects the manner in which power can change hands. But of greater significance is Mian Mir's visit to Chhaju Bhagat. Mian Mir stands outside Chhaju's kitchen and asks for permission to enter. Chhaju refuses this permission and chides him for not stepping in unhesitatingly.[12] Why should Mian Mir stand outside? Do we relate to each other in fear and suspicion or do we redefine relationships in a more open and way?

Zindaginama's challenge to conventional constructs and its journey into the past together create a world which is contained and defined and yet not so in its vast spread. When we come face to face with a classic, there may not be an initial recognition but when it continues to live with us and its manifold aspects touch our daily life, the resonance surrounds us and recognition dawns on us. We go back again and again and come back with renewed treasures. It happens to us when the text summons us and we are left with wonder, shock or unasked questions. It happens to many of us with writers like Kafka, Dostoevsky, Manto and Intizar Hussain. Even simplicity and directness leave a great deal to be unearthed. Images linger in our mind, phrases haunt us as they capture a moment of human experience, one which responds to an existential need. After all, neither a text nor life is self-contained. *Zindaginama* encompasses the before and after just as it enlarges the specific to the universal. *Zindaginama* is the inheritance which Channa has lost – the Channa who was first born in the 1952 early version. This marks the flow of history and the continuity of life with all its resilience and inheritance.

Notes

1. Refer Sobti 'Some Thoughts on Writing, Partition and *Zindaginama*' included in *Reading Partition/Living Partition*. Ed. Jasbir Jain (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2006, pp.22-29), 21-23 wherein she says that the narrative was begun soon after partition and completed in 1952 and given to a publisher in Allahabad. But an entry in the *Encyclopedia of Indian Literature*

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Vol. 5. Ed. Mohanlal. (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1992, p. 4126) mentions the date as 1944. The writer's own version has greater authenticity and is supported by the concerns expressed in the second epigraph of *Zindaginama.*

2. For more details refer Tripti Jain, 'The World of *Zindaginama*: A Woman's Perspective'? *Indian Feminisms.* Eds. Jasbir Jain and Avadhesh K. Singh. (New Delhi: Creative Books, 2001), pp. 207-212.
3. I. Allan Sealy's novel *The Trotter Nama* chronicles the Anglo-Indian history. In the 'Prologue', Sealy refers to the earlier chronicles and defines the form as an epic chronicle, a container of various hues and colours (6-7). He stresses the difference between chronicle and history. Shyamala Narayan in 'The Nation and the Anglo-Indian: A Study of the *Trotter Nama*' observes that a 'nama' contains digressions and descriptions (390). Sobti, working on slightly different times, employs different parameters and seeks to redefine history as multiple and varied and a single version of the past as one-sided and factual.
4. Refer Mark Currie, *Difference*: *the New Critical Idiom*. (London: Routledge, 2004) and see chapter 3 on Difference, (45-65), pp. 56-60. Currie's comments on Derrida, his concept of metaphysical history, and the distinction he makes between the 'sign' and the signified between the written word and the spoken are very insightful. (60)
5. S.H. Vatsayan 'Agyeya', 'Memory and Time' and 'Memory and Country'. First Samvatsar Lectures delivered at Sahitya Akademi. English translations of the two essays by Tripti Jain are included in *The Writer as Critic.* Ed. Jasbir Jain. (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2011), pp. 191-220.
6. A free translation would be 'the mood of the land left behind, it ways of living, presentation and cultural environment with all its linguistic wealth'.... (*Sobti-Vaid, Ek Samvaad* 30).
7. Kapila Vatsayan writes, 'I do not have to remind the audience of the highest place given to *vak* (speech) comparable to the concept of *logos* and it was only for civilization classification that the written word began to be prioritized.' (In 'Knowledge, Fluid, Cultures and Frozen Structures; *Summerhill* Vol. xvi. No. 1, Summer 2010 (1-30) 10.
8. 'Srijan ke Alok', *Katha-Desh* Vol. 14. No. 8. October 2010 (7-11), 9.
9. 'Chand Notes *Zindaginama* Par', *Sobti Ek Sohbat* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1989) 373-385. 373.
10. '*Randi sarkar firangi hume kya / Bejurm ko suli chada degi*? (Will this rudderless foreign government hang the innocent?) The word *randi* has many meanings. It is a word of abuse, can be used alike for widow or prostitute. Generally implies a woman without a man, here a government which is directionless and without guidance.
11. This was in a long conversation over the telephone on 17 April, 2011. This is referred to with the permission of the writer.
12. The English translation of this extract from *Zindaginama* is available in *Reading Partition/Living Partition*. Ed. Jasbir Jain, 18- 21. The passage has been translated by Tripti Jain.

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Qurratulain Hyder and the 'Idea' of a Nation: A Reading of *Aag ka Darya*

RAKHSHANDA JALIL

As a student of literature, and more recently of literary histories, I have long been tempted by the idea of exploring ideas through literature. I attempted to do so first with the idea of revolt in the poetry produced in Urdu in the immediate aftermath of the Revolt of 1857. I tried that again by exploring the idea of protest in the work of the Progressives. It was tempting to explore both the idea of India and of nationhood as reflected in Urdu literature. I found that while there was much in both Urdu prose and poetry that dwelt on the idea of a nation, much of it was written in moments of crisis, whether it was in response to the atrocities of the colonial oppressor or the horrific genocide during the Partition or whenever the threat of war loomed on the horizon. And much of it was concerned with the here and now, the immediate and topical; it was almost necessitated by a hair-trigger response to a threat perception. I looked for something that explored the idea of nationhood in a larger, broader, more panoramic sense. I found nothing could serve my purpose better than *Aag ka Darya* written by Qurratulain Hyder.

Aag ka Darya, written in Urdu in 1959 and trans-created into English by Hyder herself some 40 years later, traces the trajectory of the Indian people from the Mauryan period to modern times. *Aag ka Darya* is, to my mind, a classic instance of Imagining India, an India from ancient times to the modern age, an India which as I shall attempt to show, is changing yet constant. Putting four sub-stories into one composite whole, this magnum opus portrays an immense and complex smorgasbord of cultures and identities while remaining true to the spirit of liberal humanism that was the hallmark of both Hyder's writing and her personality. Hyder published the Urdu version when she was a mere 28 years old and in it not only does she present 2500 years of Indian history, but more importantly, gifts us – perhaps unwittingly — with a timeless metaphor for imagining India in the form of a ceaselessly flowing river. Through it she also shows how history is a continuum, a coming together of many small rivulets and tributaries that together make one sweeping river. Somewhere, she also rebukes those who go looking for important and not-so-important bits and pieces of history for they fail to see its totality.[1]

The River of Fire is the River of Time and Time, like the river, any river or a river anywhere known by any name, is by its very nature ceaselessly flowing. Those who stand, or live beside its banks, occasionally watch it pass by; but very few stop to listen to its wordless story. The river urges those who stand on the banks to travel with it; some do and some don't. Even those who travel on the river do so only for a short while; then they must either get off or drown. Some travel on the river on barges big and small, modest and stately; some succeed in traveling a short distance while some are carried off on strong currents and are lost forever within its waters. And while men and women carry on with the business of their lives, while wars are waged, empires rise and fall, Time is flowing too as ceaselessly as the river. One can neither hold it nor ride it; one can however try and hear it as it passes by in the soft ripples of the waters.

Before we look at Hyder's *River of Fire*[2], it might be interesting to first look at the metaphor of the river itself and how it has served Indian poets and writers down the ages. The mystically inclined Amir Khusrau spoke of love as a river:

Khusrau darya prem ka, ulti wa ki dhaar,
Jo utra so doobgaya, jodooba so paar

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Oh Khusrau, love is a river, it runs the other way
He who jumps in it drowns, and who drowns, gets across (Translation mine)

Invoking the river Ganges to bear witness to the arrival of those from other lands who set up home beside her banks, the revolutionary Urdu poet Iqbal asked:

Ai aabrood-e- Ganga woh din hai yaad tujhko
Utara tere kinare jab caravan hamara

O waters of the Ganga, do you remember that day
When our caravan had stopped beside your bank
(Translation mine)

The river, for the poet, became both Time and Witness to Time. By the time Hyder decided to use it as the title of her epic, both the *darya* and the *aag ka darya* had become accepted metaphors in the Urdu lexicon. Jigar Moradabadi, the classicist, had already written his famous ghazal which ended with these lines:

Yeh ishq nahi aasan, bas itna samajh lije
Ik aag ka dariya hai aur doob ke jaana hai

Love is not easy; however it is enough to understand
That it is like a river of fire and you must drown in it
(Translation mine)

However, it was Hyder who wrenched the metaphor from its philosophical-mystical moorings and located it in an altogether different, *sui genesis* context. Hyder reinforces the sense of continuity borne by her central motif – that of the river – in several other ingenious ways all through the book. Everywhere in the *River of Fire*, the adage holds true – the more things change, the more they remain the same. Characters keep reappearing in different guises but with the same names in episodes spanning several thousand years. We first encounter Gautam Nilambar, a final year student of the Forest University of Shravasti in a spot not far from the Buddhist vihara at Jetvan. As he is waiting to cross a swollen river, he sees Kumari Champak, the daughter of the Chief Minister, and is inexorably drawn towards her. Soon he meets a motley set of dramatis personae: the princess Nirmala, her brother Hari Shankar, and the low caste milkmaid Sujata. The time is 150 years after the Buddha, the place is Shravasti in the Bahraich region, and the river is the Saryu. Hyder uses her characters to make several sweeping statements about the time: about shudras converting to Buddhism and thus incurring the wrath of the powerful Brahmins, and about the prejudice against the newly emergent Buddhism from orthodox Brahminism.

Gautam, Champa, Nirmala, Hari Shankar, Sujata will reappear in many reincarnations as the novel hurtles across the centuries. They will be accompanied by a motley cast of characters bearing the same name in each reincarnation – Englishmen called Cyril Ashley, coachmen called Ganga Din, maids called Jamuna, and so on. Kumari Champak becomes Champavati, the Brahmin girl, then Champa Jan the courtesan in Oudh; she resurfaces as Champa Ahmed. Somewhere these are manifestations of a syncretism, the Ganga-Jamuni culture as it was called.[3] These reincarnations are handled imaginatively and make for an interesting sense of continuity.

Continuity is maintained in other things too. While the landscape changes – as the narrative traverses the length and breadth of the Indo-Gangetic plain, sometimes upstream sometimes downstream – a river runs all through it. While its name might change, it is – both literally and figuratively the same river. The Saryu of the opening anecdote becomes the Jamuna, or the Ganga, the Gomti, or the Padma. No matter what the name of the river or of those who dwell beside its banks, there is always a wandering mendicant somewhere nearby — an incarnation of Khwaja Khizr who had drunk from the fount of immortality and, like Saint Christopher, appears as a guide before travelers who have lost their way. Like everyone else in this novel, he is called by different names and takes different guises. Called Satyapir Satyanarayan in rural Bengal, this wandering mendicant appears in the guise of a sufi or a yogi, a nun or a monk, and shows the way both literally and metaphorically to those who are lost.

The novel opens in the season of *beerbahutis* (tiny velvety red insects, a bit like the ladybirds, called the 'Bride of Indra') and rain clouds, sometime in the 4th century B.C., with Gautam Nilamber chancing upon Hari Shankar, an absconding prince yearning to be a Buddhist monk. And thus begins a magnificent tale that flows through Time, through Pataliputra during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya, then the Sharqi Empire of Jaunpur, the Kingdom of Oudh, the British Raj till finally the night-bitten dawn of Independence ushers in Free India. While the same set of characters are born and re-born in different circumstances in different times, they are destined to be forever grappling with the same set of emotions – love, wanderlust, the yearning for something indefinable yet inexorable. The fiery River of Time flows along the banks of their lives as they are reborn and recreated, weaving through the twists and turns, the

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flows and eddies, keeping them together, and yet keeping them apart. The story comes full circle in post-Partition India when Hari Shankar and his friend Gautam Nilamber Dutt meet yet again, beside the same river Saryu, and mourn the passing of their lives into meaninglessness, their friends who have left for Pakistan, and what remains of their country of which they were once so passionately proud. Have those who have left betrayed them, or have the ones left behind betrayed those who have left? In answer, there are only more questions.

What happens between then and now — between that first meeting 2500 years ago and now in 1955 — is history, full of clamour and conflict, the deviousness of rulers and apathy of the ruled, and the irrelevance of religion in defining Indianness. Interspersed with the human drama involving the main cast of dramatis personae, the narrative throws up many questions. It is these questions that look at the 'idea' of India from different points of view at different times in history. The earliest indication of this interest in the notion of a nation-state that will continue to preoccupy the protagonists all through comes in the first episode when a group of traveling Persians tells Gautam Nilambar that they have come to Hind to seek a livelihood. A perplexed Gautam asks: 'Where is Hind?'[4] 'The country in which you live!' the Persian answers. He then goes on to list the similarities between Persian and the languages of Hind. To which Gautam cynically remarks, 'Affinity in language does not keep people from fighting and hating one another.'[5] His words are prophetic as we will see later.

Gautam dies while trying to cross a river in full spate. Chandragupta Maurya's army invades peaceful Shravasti, a small, semi-pastoral outpost ruled by a weak *rajan* because the Prime Minister of the great Mauryan empire doesn't want weak feudatories. As Chandragupta becomes the first *samrat*, emperor of the state of Bharat, Hyder muses when 'Death cancels all conflicts of Rup and Arup, Bhava and Abhava'[6] is there any place for pacifists and theorists? An ordinary mortal, 'not descended from the sun or moon', Chandragupta trampled over the old kingdom of Pataliputra, causing Hyder to muse: 'Victory breeds hatred because the vanquished sleep in sorrow, and only that person is peaceful who is above victory and defeat and happiness.'[7]

The narrative jumps 1500 years and Gautam's place is taken by Abul Mansur Kamaluddin of Nishapur. Born of an Iranian Shia mother and a Sunni Arab father, he has come to India in search of fortune. It is the year 1476 and at the crossroads of the world India is being touted as the land of tomorrow. Sufis, scholars, merchants, scribes, people of all faiths and classes are flocking to this land of opportunity. One of them is Kamaluddin or Kamal who is headed to Jaunpur, the academic capital of India, aglitter with the lamp of learning lit by the enlightened Sharqi rulers. 'The Sultan business is good business,' a wandering dervish tells Kamal as he trots along on the high road to a new life in a new land:

> The modus operandi is simple and to the point. Wherever the government at the centre loses its grip over the provinces you gather enough military strength and a few allies, usually Hindu Rajput chieftains, and declare your independence. Then you obtain a firman from the nominal caliph of Islam who resides in Cairo. According to this decree of the figurehead pontiff you become his deputy caliph and the Friday sermon in the cathedral mosque and all the mosques of your realm is read in your name, instead of the reigning monarch's at Delhi. You mint your own currency and send out your envoys. You assume the grandiose titles of the ancient Kings of Iran till you are replaced, often violently, by another dynasty.[8]

And, indeed, every power-hungry militiaman of Turko-Iranian descent wants to proclaim himself sultan and capture Delhi, the beating heart of the country called Hind. Towards this end they make and break alliances, wage wars, buy peace, extend the borders of their ever-changing kingdoms. And what of the people of Hind? They seem happy enough with whoever rules over them as long as they are allowed to indulge their one grand passion, namely, Religion. They are happy as long as they have the time to indulge it and to celebrate their many fairs and festivals all through the year. Qalandars hobnob with yogis, exchanging ideas and practices from each other, bhakta cults flourish side by side with Sufi silsilas, and the countryside is awash with wandering mendicants of different faiths and orders. In the midst of all this Gautam reborn as Kamal meets Champavati, the sister of a learned brahmin in Ayodhya. Fated as they are to be forever separated, he moves on, across the breadth of Hindustan, witnessing the rise and fall of empires.

In 1484 Bahlol Lodi captures Jaunpur and in 1500 the city of colleges and universities, the academic capital of Hind, home to thousands of ulema, sufi lodges and writers, is razed to the ground by his son, Sikandar Lodi. 'Every age produces a liberal,' writes Hyder, 'who behaves like a barbarian due to the exigencies of the times.' Kamaluddin witnesses the destruction of the great and liberal civilisation of Jaunpur nurtured by the Ganga-Jamuni Sharqi rulers at the hands of Sikandar Lodi. Though he is himself a poet, scholar and educationist, Sikandar Lodi orders the scholars of the Sharqi court to be presented before him 'tied by their turbans.' Sikandar Lodi also bans the annual *urs* of Salar Baba at Behraich and the worship of Seetla Mata; he also declares the weaver-poet Kabir a heretic. Kamaluddin reminds us of

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how history does indeed repeats itself when he rues:

Baghdad fell once again with the fall of Jaunpur. I, Abul Mansur Kamaluddin, live to mourn its loss, just as I grieved for the holocaust of Baghdad though it happened nearly three centuries ago. I have seen the passing of a great and liberal civilization in my own lifetime, here in India. The Mongols were heathens who sacked Baghdad,Sikander is a Muslim who devastated Jaunpur.[9]

Stirring things were happening all through the medieval ages but Sikandar Lodi's reign was especially tumultuous. Kabir was singing his songs of heresy and irreverence when a child called Nanak was born in a Khatri household in Punjab; he was destined to lay the foundations of a new syncretic religion. Kabir reminds Kamal of Rumi, who had lived two hundred years ago. 'They all say the same thing,' rues Hyder, 'but it doesn't help.'[10]

Meanwhile, in the far eastern arm of Hindustan, the Suhravardy order was busy enticing the lower castes of Bengal:

Everybody seemed to be a singer in Bengal. Storytellers chanted roop-kathas; ferrymen, snake-charmers and elephant-trappers sang their ballads. They sang of Allah, Mohammed or Radha-Krishna. Vaishnavism was flourishing. Kamal rowed his boat from dargah to dargah, also singing. There were dangerous rapids in Chittagong, broad, winding rivers, mountain paths shaded with radhakali and krishnachura blossoms. Mosques and Tantric temples lay hidden in bamboo groves.[11]

Kamal, the wanderer from Nishapur, eventually marries the low-caste Sujata Debi, settles down in a village beside a river and becomes the writer of innumerable ballads and folk songs that are sung in rural Bengal long after he is dead and gone. An unwilling pawn in the great game between Afghan and Mughal forces, as the rude soldiers of Sher Shah's army continued their eastward offensive, Kamal dies with these words from the Holy Quran on his lips: 'Return, O Soul, to thy Lord, accepted, and accepting — '[12]

***

The next episode begins with Cyril Ashley as its 'hero'. It is the year 1797. The Battle of Plassey is over and the English have long shed their garb of traders. The once-mighty Mughal empire is divided into 22 provinces each governed by a provincial viceroy. Delhi has been ravaged by Nadir Shah. Famines stalk the once-fertile land from Bengal to Oudh. The Nawab Vazirs of Oudh are holding on to the last vestiges of high culture. They celebrate Holi and basant with as much fervour as their Hindu subjects. But the Court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah is like Camelot; its candle burning brightly at both ends gives out a lovely luminous light.

Like other provincial rulers such as Baz Bahadur of Malwa and Hussain Shah Nayak of Jaunpur, Wajid Ali Shah is also an accomplished musician, an exponent of *thumri* and *dadra*, a master-stylist of Kathak, creator of Ras Lila in which he himself dances as Krishna. This most unusual of rulers is known to his people as Akhtar Piya or Jan-i-Alam – the life and soul of the world. In this fairy kingdom, Kamal reappears as Kamal Ali Raza Bahadur alias Nawab Kamman and Champa as the courtesan Champabai – once again, they are lovers destined never to meet. Gautam appears as Gautam Nilambar Dutt, a fine specimen of *bhadralok* gentility who regards the Uprising of 1857 as a quixotic impulse. 'The solid fact remains, thought Gautam, that after 1857 the English ushered India into the modern age.'[13] Kamal, on the other hand, cannot reconcile the atrocities committed by the English upon the Indian people with their otherwise modern and liberal outlook. Having spent two years in England and France, Kamal says, 'The English are a fine people in their own country; they become a different species as soon as they cross the Suez.'[14]

The narrative takes another leap forward. The year is now 1940 and the setting once again Lucknow but a Lucknow seething with political unrest. And it is here, in the fourth and last section that the terrain becomes more contested, the dualities sharper; what is more, there are no longer clear-cut answers to any questions. The same set of characters reappears in different guises. Hari Shankar and his sister NirmalaRaizada live in SingharewaliKothi on the banks of the Gomti. Their friends and neighbours are the equally genteel, well-born, well-educated Kamal, Talat and Tehmina. Kamal is hari Shankar's alter ego, his *hum zaad*. Together, they listen to Pahari Sanyal songs on the radio, and along with the girls enact scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and go 'ganjing' in the tony Hazrat Ganj. The girls play the sitar and learn to dance while the boys play tennis at the club and sprout poetry. A cocktail of Indian society – from different parts of the country, of different classes and castes – is found in the campuses and coffeehouses of Lucknow. In the midst of all this, Hyder throws a googly:

There was yet another aspect of the new nationalist movement that was making its presence felt –some people had openly begun talking of Ancient Hindu Culture and the Glory-that-was-Islam. How was Indian culture to be defined? Was it a ruse for Hindus to enslave the Muslims? Could 'real' Indians only be Hindus? Were Muslims unholy intruders who should be treated as such?[15]

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These are new questions. And Hyder refuses to give clear answers; instead, she flits from story-teller to historian. She adopts a style that is at once sweeping and innovative in the Urdu fiction of her generation. Every now and then her characters dive inwards and resume their journey through Time in their imagination. That is when Hyder steps in and takes us on a conducted tour of history. That is when some of the most significant questions get asked – questions about religion, culture and identity and the over-riding question of Indianness. Who are 'real' Indians? Can 'real' Indians only be Hindu? Can culture be pure Hindu or pure Muslim? Who will decide its purity and content — the Hindu Mahasabha or the Muslim league? The Muslim thread, Hyder says again and again, has been present in every pattern of the Indian tapestry. Can this thread be destroyed, pulled out by the root and obliterated by the demand for Pakistan? And, is the demand for Pakistan a threat to the idea of India?

Through certain members of the extended family like the staunch 'Congressi' Asad Mamu and his diametrically opposed Zaki Chacha of the Muslim League, through Gunga Din the coachman and Ram Autar the gardener, and their illiterate but enlightened wives, Hyder tries to explore why some families hitched their wagon to the Muslim League and others put their faith in the Congress, and why the Muslim League enamoured some Muslims and left others cold. When the Leaguers first spoke of protecting the rights of the Muslims by securing fair representation in the legislature, they gave voice to a long-felt need to recognize the Muslims as a distinct religious and political unit. On the face of it these seemed perfectly legitimate aspirations; the problem, Hyder muses, lay in the manner in which the League went about its business. It employed a combination of rhetoric and religion to bludgeon its way. It used fear as a campaign tool, making Muslims view all Hindus as a "threat" to their survival once the protective presence of the British was removed.

The League's final unequivocal demand – a separate homeland – did not appeal to some Muslims on the grounds of faulty logic. Jinnah's assurance of providing constitutional safeguards to minorities appeared humbug in the face of his proclamation of a Pakistan that would be a hundred per cent Muslim. To return to Hyder's narrative, when Pakistan is eventually formed, it leaves many wondering if the cleavage of hearts and land was truly inevitable, or could it have been averted? What went so wrong between the two major communities of the subcontinent? What caused the disenchantment with the Congress? What made some staunch Congressmen rally around the once-derided Muslim League? What cooled the Muslim's ardour to join nationalistic mainstream politics? For that matter, why was the Muslim suddenly regarded as a toady and a coward content to let the Hindus fight for freedom from the imperial yoke? Why was he suddenly beyond the pale? How did he become the 'other'? And what of the dream of the Muslim Renaissance spelt out in such soul-stirring verse by the visionary poet Iqbal? In turn, why did the Congress baulk at the issue of separate electorates, calling it absurd and retrograde? Why did it do nothing to allay the Muslim fear that the freedom promised by the Congress meant freedom for Hindus alone, not freedom for all? Seen from the Muslim point of view, the Congress appeared guilty of many sins of omission and some of commission. 'Nationalism' increasingly began to mean thinking and living in the Congress way and none other. Those who lived or thought another way came to be regarded as anti-national, especially in the years immediately after independence.

Given the scope and extent of the questions posed by Hyder, I want to raise a question of my own, the question of progressivism. Considering that Hyder was consistently reviled by the progressives (with near-contemporary Ismat Chughtai mocking her bitterly for her the anglicised characters), it is important to see how Hyder can be located (if at all) in the progressive current that swept through Urdu literature of the 1930s-50s. For that, one must first establish who or what is a progressive? Only those who belong to particular schools of thought and subscribe to well-established ideologies? Or, those who are willing to look ahead? Those critics of Hyder who have called her, among other things a Pompom Darling and a reactionary, would do well to remember that she admitted that there was blood on the hands of the beautiful people of Camelot:

> One morning we discovered that our own hands were drenched in blood, and we saw that all those fine people – intellectuals and authors and leaders – many of them had blood-stained hands too. Most of them were not willing to atone. They ran away, or took different avatars, but there were some genuine human beings, as well.[16]

And who are these genuine people? They are humble folk, gardeners, farmers, peasants and betel-leaf sellers, *chikan* embroiders – the 'real' backbone of India. For all her talk of expatriates living in St John's Woods, of high tea on manicured lawns, of young men playing tennis and girls reciting Shakespeare in the sylvan surroundings of IT college, in short, for all her talk of people who live in houses with quaint names like Singharewali Kothi who traipse through Moon Garden (Chand Bagh!), there is in Hyder's literary sensibility a profound understanding of

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the real India that lived on the fringes of the Camelot she knew and inhabited. And it is this clear understanding that runs like a shaft of clear light not only through *River of Fire* but through much of her writing that — to my mind, regardless of her ideology or affiliation, makes her a progressive writer.

A large part of the last section of the novel is located in England where the diaspora of young intellectuals from the Indian sub-continent congregates – in search of higher education, better jobs, and a more cosmopolitan outlook. But like birds of passage, they must eventually fly back home – either their old home in India or in search of a new home in Pakistan. Kamal, a highly qualified scientist, returns to India and finds his home declared evacuee property and he an 'intending evacuee'. He files a law suit to reclaim his ancestral home, but loses. He looks for a job but can't find one in a newly-independent country grappling with rampant unemployment. Defeated, he leaves for Pakistan with his aged parents. The staunch nationalist who had once declared, 'I don't want religion; India needs peace and bread' capitulates. Hyder neither condemns nor approves. She has set out the facts of her 'case'; she leaves the reader to draw his own conclusion.

Millions of families cross the border in search of new lives; others stayed back, often to an uncertain future. Hyder too left for Pakistan where, incidentally she wrote *Aag ka Darya*. She returned to India in 1961 and never discussed her reasons for going away or returning. Perhaps because she had already given her answers and had no further desire to rake the ashes; her answers can be found scattered not just in *Aag ka Darya* but in her entire corpus of writing which is one long ode to syncretism, pluralism, liberalism and secularism.

Notes

1. The question being asked all the time by some character or the other in *River of Fire* is – Do people cease to be relevant? Did Beethoven become irrelevant after the Second World War? Why then have historically important personages such as Baz Bahadur, Husain Shah Nayak and Wajid Ali Shah become irrelevant in modern India?
2. Considerably shorter than the Urdu original, the English version was 'transcreated' by Hyder herself. There are several apocryphal, and delightful, stories about Hyder's insistence and arbitrariness as a translator of her own work. She insisted on chopping off large chunks of historical passages, assuming perhaps that the English reader would be privy to factual details that the Urdu reader might not. This brutal self-censoring and excising has given an occasional jumpiness to the English text; however, this is apparent only to those who have read the Urdu version. It is safe to say that *Rive of Fire* stands on its own as an outstanding piece of writing in English. Since there is more than one version of *River of Fire*, in this paper when I refer to the English text, I am referring to *River of Fire* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 1998).
3. The question of syncretism has concerned most of Qurratulain Hyder's contemporaries. Ismat Chughtai, for instance, has used the presence of the folk and popular traditions to enhance the multiculturalism that was such a vital part of the *qasbati* culture of the Awadh region.
4. *River of Fire*, op. cit., p 43.
5. Ibid., pp. 43-44.
6. Ibid, p. 39.
7. Ibid., p. 42.
8. Ibid., p 63.
9. Ibid., p. 89
10. Ibid., p. 98
11. Ibid., p 99
12. Ibid., p. 102
13. Ibid., p 170
14. Ibid., p 171
15. Ibid., pp. 202-203
16. Ibid., p. 310

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Alternative Modernities and Medieval Indian Literature: The Oriya *Lakshmi Purana* as Radical Pedagogy

SATYA P. MOHANTY

In the early 1500s in Orissa, the saint-mystic Achyutananda Das composes a short poem called "Bipra Chalaka," which ends with a defiant philosophical question. A self-declared low-caste (*sudra*) prophet of social change, Achyutananda directs the question to the Brahminical priestly and intellectual class (the "bipra") gathered around the famed temple complex in Puri.[1] Answer me, he demands, in the final couplet of a poem written in the vernacular, in Oriya instead of the classical Sanskrit, "Does *dharma* derive from *karma* or *karma* from *dharma*?" *Dharma* and *karma* are familiar notions in Hinduism, but in medieval India *dharma* referred primarily to the duty socially prescribed for individuals because of their station in life (their *varna*). In regional traditions, however, such as the one to which Achyutanada belongs, the word *dharma* had also come to signify something like *punya*: that is, virtue or moral merit. Achyutananda's question, framed as a dispute ("chalaka") with the privileged intellectual and priestly mindset, draws attention to the tension generated by the two meanings of the word. Is karma (action, work) determined by dharma, one's ascribed station in life? Or does an individual's karma, or actions, determine his or her dharma (virtue)?[2]

Achyutananda Das's question resonates both philosophically and politically. Identifying himself with the *panchasakha,* the group of poet-saints who were laying the groundwork for vernacular Oriya literature by writing for the masses, not just for the Sanskrit-educated elite, the author of "Bipra Chalaka" sees his question as contributing to a movement for social and cultural equality. Following in the footsteps of Sarala Das, the fifteenth-century Oriya farmer-poet who produced vernacular renderings of the Sanskrit epics the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana,* and who proudly claimed the identity of "sudra muni" ("low-caste sage"), Achyutananda consolidates the public identity of the Oriya writer as both sudra and revolutionary. He voices his challenge to Brahminical authority at roughly the same time that, a continent away, a scholar-monk in Wittenburg is getting ready to nail his "95 Theses" on the door of his church as well as to translate the Bible into the vernacular German. This is also the time when the radical devotional (*bhakti*) movement is sweeping across India (having originated in the south and now spreading to the north) and when Achyutananda's cohort of mystic poets are all drawing on Orissan society's diverse intellectual traditions (Buddhism, Saivism, Vaishnavism, as well as Saktism and Tantrism, both mainly derived from the tribal cultures) to formulate an egalitarian pedagogical project for a society in transition.[3]

This essay focuses on a popular narrative poem, a *purana,* written by Achyutananda's fellow panchasakha writer Balaram Das. Balaram was the oldest in the group, and probably the most radical. He identified himself as a sudra writer, and rendered the Sanskrit *Ramayana* into Oriya, adopting the *dandi* meter—popularized by Sarala Das—in both that text and in the *Lakshmi Purana.* The dandi form used rhyming couplets with variable line-lengths and hence was flexible enough for use in oral performances, especially folk plays [see C. Das, *Balaram* 28–29]; Balaram Das uses a tight form of rhyming couplets with fourteen-syllable lines. The puranas targeted a large, nonelite audience, and were written earlier in Sanskrit and more recently in the vernacular languages. Most puranas contained traditional religious and social messages conveyed through elaborate narratives about gods and goddesses, demons, and ordinary humans,

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tracing cosmic origins and predicting possible catastrophes. From late antiquity into the late medieval period, when Hindu society expanded its reach through new agrarian settlements and incorporation of the indigenous tribal populations, the puranas were a genre intended to domesticate and assimilate the new groups into the Brahminical ideological universe. They were, in other words, texts of the hegemonic culture.[4]

Balaram Das's *Lakshmi Purana,* however, is a counter hegemonic text. As I show in the summary below and through the textual analysis, Das attempts to articulate a subaltern consciousness of the oppressed and their common identity.[5] His explicitly feminist narrative centers on the actions of a strong goddess who challenges male Brahminical authority and advocates both feminism and caste equality. Although ideologically somewhat constrained by its generic narrative framework with its emphasis on ritual worship, the *Lakshmi Purana,* written mainly in a colloquial, non-Sanskritized form of Oriya, is textually layered and often startlingly radical. It shows the process of vernacularization—both linguistic and cultural—at work, as the themes of the dominant Hindu tradition are appropriated into the regional and local context and made to yield to the demands of the lowly segments of society. Its narrative gives dramatic power to the philosophical question broached by Achyutananda Das; the goddess Lakshmi has an egalitarian vision and a new conception of the value of the individual based on action, duty, and work—especially traditionally devalued work. Analyzing some of the literary features of Balaram Das's pedagogical poem, I wish to show how neglected genres like the puranas and vrata kathas[6] can yield insights about radical social and cultural values, values that scholars have not always expected to find in medieval India.[7] Together with studies of the bhakti movement that have reinvigorated the study of the role of religion in producing progressive social change, this essay will, I hope, contribute to the emerging discussion of "indigenous" and "alternative" modernities, one that will decenter the European version of modernity without retreating into cultural or historical relativism. Analyses of precolonial cultural production can help "provincialize" the European experience and provide the grounds for a genuine comparison across cultures, building on Charles Taylor's important intellectual archeology of the West.[8] Such analyses can show how quintessentially modern values like human equality, based on the ideal of a critical and self-reflexive individual, are not necessarily Eurocentric notions, and that they have been articulated in some precolonial, non-European contexts. If literary explorations like mine are convincing, they will also suggest ways of doing comparative historical and cultural studies of what we call "modernity" by expanding the range of texts we traditionally examine. They will indicate how literary analysis, especially of traditional South Asian texts, can contribute to a multidisciplinary collaborative project of historical retrieval, leading to a reinterpretation of what we often condescendingly call the "premodern."

Traditional Form, Subversive Content

While Balaram Das's *Lakshmi Purana* uses traditional literary forms and seems orthodox on the surface, it conveys a message that is anything but conventional. Das intended his narrative to become part of agrarian Oriya society's rhythm of harvest festivals and ritual worship, and so he adopts the form of the vrata katha genre. The *Lakshmi Purana* begins with a hymn praising Lakshmi and provides details about the days devoted to her worship. People of all classes and castes, from chandala to Brahmin, worship the goddess on her holy days in the month of "Margashira, [which] is the essence of all the twelve months" [35], the season of harvest, as the narrator Parashara explains to the sage Narada.[9] The text contains an account of the ritual worship, of how the home and the heart are prepared to invite the goddess in. It contains, again in accord with the traditional form, general details about what is to be gained if the rituals are observed with devotion and what is lost if they are not. The "katha" portion of the text, as is conventional, provides a narrative explaining why the goddess is to be worshipped, what boons she bestows, and what powers she has.

The basic tale—the "katha" that accompanies the details about the ritual "vrata"—is simple but unusual. In the month of Margashira, on a dasami—the day before ekadasi, the holy eleventh day of the lunar calendar when the Lords fast together with all mortals—the Goddess Lakshmi gets ready for her regular visit to the world outside the temple complex of Puri. This is the season when houses are cleaned and decorated with rice paste so that Lakshmi can be ritually invited in, and it gives the goddess a chance to see that women—in particular—are at work taking care of their homes, tending to their social duties. What Lakshmi observes is that many women are unmindful of their duties, and even unmindful of the implications of the holy day devoted to her worship. Disguised as an ordinary human, an old Brahmin woman, Lakshmi advises a rich trader's wife how to perform the ritual work (the vrata) meant for that day. Later, crossing beyond the bounds of the city proper, she arrives at the house of Sriya, a poor outcaste woman. Sriya's hut has been cleaned and prepared for the goddess: sanctified, wiped clean with holy cow dung, the

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flowers arranged, and the rice-paste drawings done on the walls and the floor. Pleased and impressed with the woman's sincere devotion to work and worship, Lakshmi manifests herself in her house on the lotus flower Sriya has painted on her front porch (the lotus is the goddess's traditional symbol). She blesses Sriya and grants her boons. When she returns to the temple, the two Lords prevent her from re-entering because she has been in an outcaste's house; at the angry Balaram's insistence, the younger brother Jagannath tells Lakshmi that she must leave—at least, as he puts it, until Balaram can be pacified. Lakshmi reminds Jagannath of the promise he had made to allow her to go on regular sojourns out into the world, to grace every home and feed everyone "from the lowliest insects to the Supreme Brahman" [51], and leaves with the curse that the two brothers will suffer the fate that befalls anyone whom Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune and well-being, has abandoned.

The middle section of the narrative may be called "The Lesson the Goddess Teaches the Mightiest Gods," as she makes sure—conspiring with her fellow goddesses Saraswati and Nidravati, together with a few minor gods of the natural world, and the spirits of the underworld—that the two brothers learn what it means to be poor, hungry, and socially despised. Much of the action takes place in the city of Puri, outside the main temple complex, as the brothers take the shape of Brahmin mendicants and go in search of food. One person after another turns them down, wary of the two strange Brahmin beggars, while others who wish to feed them discover that they cannot, for inexplicable reasons. So they conclude that the two mendicants are to be avoided at all cost, since they must have been abandoned by the Goddess of Fortune. At long last the brothers arrive, unknowingly, at the new house that Viswakarma, the architect-god of carpenters and all craftspeople, has built for Lakshmi, and decide to beg for food there. The goddess instructs her maids to tell them that hers is the house of an outcaste woman. Hungry and desperate, they shed their caste pretensions and inhibitions, accept their final humiliation, and agree to eat food cooked by a chandaluni.

Lakshmi cooks an elaborate and splendid feast for them, and quietly reveals her identity to her husband when she sends them his favorite rice cake ("podapitha"). He seeks reconciliation with her, acknowledges her glory ("mahima"), and agrees to formally recognize the holy Thursday ("Lakshmivar" in Oriya) that is dedicated to her worship. The goddess relents, but demands more: that the egalitarian values she has defended in the world outside be recognized inside the holiest of holy spaces, the Puri temple. She asks that, within its precincts, Brahmin and chandala, people of all castes and classes, be allowed to eat together, feed each other, every single day—and that the Lord endorse this practice. Jagannath agrees, "Yes, it shall be thus, dear Lakshmi; may your glory shine through the ages" [76, translation modified]. Lakshmi agrees to return to the temple complex, and as they enter together, harmony is restored to the cosmos.

It is overwhelmingly likely that the practice of allowing members of various castes to eat together within the Jagannath temple complex predates the composition of Balaram Das's *Lakshmi Purana.* Scholars have discussed the tribal origins of the deity and how tribal priests are incorporated into the highly ritualized worship in the temple.[10] It is safe to conjecture that Balaram Das wrote his text to defend an antinomian practice that was already in place as a result of struggles by tribal and lower-caste devotees. Balaram Das's purana is most probably an attempt to create an origin myth, providing divine sanction for a practice that must have been deeply offensive to Brahminical sensibilities.

The narrative is inherently subversive, for Balaram Das's Lakshmi is no ordinary goddess, and what she demands is socially unsettling as well as universal in its reach. She is not just another strong female deity who wants to protect her devotees against danger (the theme of many vrata kathas and mangalkavyas of the time [see below, and esp. Note 12]), but rather a goddess who will redefine our basic ethical notions: the meaning of duty, of action, and indeed even of our identities. Balaram Das's *Lakshmi Purana* is a feminist text primarily because it shows a female goddess using her personal power to challenge the way society defines identities and rewards virtue, and the way tradition—even when sanctioned by the Lord himself— understands our ascribed *jati*-identity and its implications for how we are to be treated.[11] The *Lakshmi Purana* echoes Achyutananda's poem, for it too makes *varnashrama dharma,* the duty that is supposed to derive from our socially ascribed identities, subordinate to our karma, our actions as individuals. Women and outcastes come together in this text to question unjustified authority, and when the Lord Jagannath and his brother Balaram are humiliated and taught a lesson, the critique is directed primarily at their arbitrary and hypocritical use of patriarchal power. It is in short a moral critique of how their deeds are inconsistent with their declared principles, how their actions contravene their promises. The rift between speech and action reveals the arbitrariness of social (and here even divine) power. In pointing to this rift, the goddess questions the claims to authority made by those who are born to it, for the implication is that authority ought in fact to derive from virtue. Without such congruence between power and principled behavior, the identities we possess because of

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our social privileges—of caste, wealth, and status—have no ethical justification.

It is clear from the bare outlines of the narrative that Lakshmi's power is being celebrated and announced to the world. There is a tradition of powerful women characters in Indian literature, especially in the puranas devoted to tribal or local village goddesses. Tribal cultures were more egalitarian than Hindu society, and tales of a powerful tribal or village goddess revealing her strength in a moment of crisis to save her devotees are common in eastern India, particularly in the popular traditions of Assam, Bengal, and Orissa.[12] But Lakshmi is no local deity; her origins can be traced back to the Vedas, and she has the sanction of the epics and the numerous puranas where she is mentioned as Lord Vishnu's consort, the bestower of wealth, fortune, and happiness, both worldly and spiritual.[13] In the Oriya literary tradition, Balaram draws on his immediate literary ancestor, the fifteenth-century poet Sarala Das, who invokes Lakshmi in his *Mahabharata* as a goddess who aids the poor and removes sorrow ("daridra bhanjani"; "dukha binasini" in the *Madhyaparba* [see S. Dash 6]). Sarala Das's Oriya rendering of the *Mahabharata* is itself full of strong women, like Draupadi, and his Sita (in his *Vilanka Ramayana*) playfully challenges Rama with the assertion that he would not have been able to kill the demon Ravana without her help! Balaram, then, draws on a hoary tradition that places Lakshmi at the center of the pantheon of the gods, as well as a regional one that worships several strong female heroines and goddesses.

Balaram Das's Lakshmi is a composite of all of these traditional images and themes, but she is above all a vernacularized goddess, an audacious local appropriation of a Vedic deity for local socio-political purposes. The colloquial Oriya that Balaram Das uses (here and elsewhere, even in his translation of the Ramayana, the *Jagmohan Ramayana*) identifies Lakshmi in the very first line as Vishnu's "gharani"—instead of the more traditional *tatsama* word "gruhini" (both can be translated as "homemaker").[14] She is addressed in an informal and endearing way (just as she is in Sarala Das's text) as "Ma go"—which roughly translates as "Mother, my dear"—as opposed to the more traditional "O, Ma!" Lakshmi teases her husband when he forgets his promises to her, loves to put on her clothes and jewelry, and loses her temper when Lord Balaram, Jagannath's elder brother, judges her harshly and reveals his upper-caste prejudices against women and non-Brahmins. What we end up with in this Oriya purana is a goddess who is simultaneously vernacularized—that is, reconceived in the regional and local cultural idiom—and made radical and universal. The values she comes to represent are not just socially subversive. They articulate principles—action is more important than social identity, karma more significant than varnashrama dharma—that can be exported, to the nation and beyond.[15] The *Lakshmi Purana* invites its readers to use it as a pedagogical tool, as a text that counters the dominant pedagogy of the Brahminical elite. While Balaram Das's purana teaches us to do our duty, and thus participates in the general project of "civilizing" and "domesticating" (in the literal sense) the diverse members of his agrarian society, it grounds social equality and justice in principles that are not limited to the goddess's own devotees, or even to Puri. These principles are radical because they are based on more than personal sentiment and in fact have universal reach. They call for recognition of the worth of individual human beings, of the value of work done well and of the worker as potentially an agent of social transformation.[16] Balaram Das's Goddess Lakshmi criticizes local, regional customs and practices, but the ideas her narrative expresses transcend the boundaries of locality and region.

Puranic and Radical Pedagogy

Generically, puranas were pedagogical texts and thus contained invitations, indeed exhortations, to the readers or listeners to study them regularly. Balaram Das puts his exhortation in the mouth of the Lord himself. Lord Jagannath promises that women who recite the *Lakshmi Purana* will "be righteous in this life/and will find a place in heaven" [75]. He adds: "If a woman explains this glorious scripture to others, the virtue she will earn will be indeed immeasurable" [75, translation modified]. While Oriya women are urged to read or listen to this tale, they are also recruited as commentators on the work and as pedagogues. Recitation and explication of scriptural texts have been institutionalized in Orissan culture since Jagannath Das established the first Bhagavat ghara in Puri in the sixteenth century, and today small meeting-places exist in almost every Oriya Hindu village where villagers can gather at the end of the day to listen to and discuss the Bhagavat and other traditional texts [Mallik, *Paradigms* 195–96]. Balaram Das has this kind of decentralized pedagogical context in mind as he makes the Lord invite ordinary Oriya women to both listen to the *Lakshmi Purana* and to continue to talk about it, to explain— and discuss—its significance. Women are in effect encouraged—even mobilized—to take this purana into every home, to repeat its message about the duty of the homemaker and to begin to explicate, or mull over, its lessons about gender and caste relations, about the centrality of karma and the egalitarian vision of social justice.

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But once a reader gets down to the business of explicating and discussing the *Lakshmi Purana,* what will she find? What, in the text, cries out for explanation? Perhaps the most pertinent assertion of the text concerns the value of women's work, in particular the work most women do in Das's society: sustain the domestic world by cooking and cleaning, feeding and caring for others. The narrative turns on precisely this point, for what the Lords don't recognize at first is the value of what women do. Balaram says derisively to Jagannath: "Listen to me, Govinda. . . . If your Lakshmi stays in the Temple, I will not. A wife serves a husband; she is like a shoe that adorns the foot of her husband. If I have a brother, I can always find a billion wives for him" [48, translation modified]. It is this attitude that the goddess challenges. Lakshmi does not want to punish the brothers merely because she is angry; they must be taught, she insists, a social lesson. She is clear about the implications of what her husband has done, as she explains to her assistants. "If the Lord Jagannath can abandon me, his wife," the goddess explains, "imagine what—especially in this Kali Yuga [our Age of Vice]—ordinary men will do! Men must recognize how much they need us" [57, translation modified]. The Lord's actions reflect a common patriarchal practice in medieval India, and instead of merely condemning it Lakshmi proceeds to show how much (among other things) the *material* welfare of a household—as of society—derives from the work women do. At various moments in the narrative, the two brothers are shown that they are not self-sufficient, that they *need* the "gharani" Lakshmi. If the *Lakshmi Purana* teaches its female readers the domestic virtues traditionally associated with women—that of taking care of the home, of service, and gracious hospitality toward guests—it does not do so in a purely traditional way. It teaches service, not servility. The devotion the Goddess associates with work, duty, and ritual worship is simultaneously religious and ethical. It advocates the kind of mindfulness without which even worship becomes meaningless. But mindful and loving attention to one's home and to one's work coexists in this text with recognition of the inherent value and dignity of the work a woman does—and hence by implication of individual women, of workers. As we follow the narrative we come to realize that the exercise of power—even the power of the Lord—must not contravene the contractual understanding that the existence of the household implies, that we respect the cooperative division of labor and the value of all kinds of labor. What Lord Balaram is chided (and punished) for is the arbitrary use of his patriarchal authority to deny Lakshmi reentry into the Temple. The Lord Balaram we encounter in this text is arrogant as well as stubborn, unresponsive to reason.

Since Lord Balaram stands for the figure of arbitrary and arrogant male authority in this feminist text, it makes sense that he would be the target of the text's barbs and jokes. Especially given its oral performances—we know that the *Lakshmi Purana* has been performed for centuries as a folk play, especially in the popular *kathiapala* and *suanga* forms—we can appreciate the raucous humor with which Balaram is ridiculed by some of the women characters [on Oriya folk performances, see Mallik, *Paradigms* 193–94]. We see him called names—"fatso," for instance (the servant woman does not recognize him but refers to him as looking like "the fatso" who had "once hounded our Goddess Lakshmi out from the Great Temple" [64]); we see how, driven wild by hunger, he gobbles down huge amounts of rice and is gently ridiculed by the maid who is serving him. Consciousness comes late to the male gods, only after the ritual humiliation is over. Turned away from home after home, mistaken for thieves and called abusive names, the starving brothers are finally willing to accept their abjection and to ignore the caste prohibitions that prevent them from eating food served by an outcaste. "Let us opt to lose our caste and eat" here, says the famished Balaram to his younger brother [67]. Unbeknownst to them, of course, it is the Goddess Lakshmi's house.

The Construction of Identities

If the education of the divine brothers is one major aspect of Balaram Das's text and it is based on the unraveling of their patriarchal and upper-caste roles, the other aspect of the text is the creation of an alternative common identity of the oppressed. Gods and humans, Brahmins and chandalas, are all brought down to earth, as it were, and their social identities exposed as, in the end, constructed and hence contingent. While it would be too much to impute to the *Lakshmi Purana* the notion of the modern self-interested and acquisitive individual, disembedded from religious or spiritual community, it would not be hard to see how for Das the individual's karma is a major source of value for the world as a whole. Karma is not rigidly determined by a pregiven identity; social identities are secondary.[17]

Nowhere does this emphasis become more clear than in the way even the goddess's own identity is shown to be layered and complex, and in part a product of her own will and changing values. When she decides to leave the temple complex, she announces to her husband that she will give up her ascribed privileges and identify as a chandaluni. When she makes the brothers go through one humiliation after another, she does this as a self-avowed chandaluni. The real chandaluni of the tale, Sriya, cannot

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live within the bounds of the city of Puri, and Lakshmi—who lives at the very center of the city, in the sacred temple complex—willingly transforms herself into an outsider. She refuses the rituals of purification that her husband offers, and moves to the outskirts of the city; we see the transformation of her identity most forcefully in two passages that echo each other and stand out for their poetic power. The first of these describes Lakshmi putting on her ornaments and jewels, happy that she is going out to do what she loves most, to serve and feed the world's creatures. The narrative, which is usually fast-paced, begins almost in slow motion as this passage names each resplendent jewel proudly announcing its "indescribable" beauty to the universe. She is, after all, the goddess of wealth and fortune, and her appearance is radiant as she explores and announces her own glory. Everything we have heard about her physical features has been muted and generic,[18] but now, putting on her ornaments one by one, she seems to be revealing the inner glory of "Sri," the divine beauty with which she is associated. But the intricate details in Das's description are local and regional, not traditional:

On the side of her nose she placed nine-jeweled rings
Around her neck the four-stringed gemstone
Elegant armlets and bracelets on her arms and wrists
And cat's-eye pendants dangled from threads of gold.
Ornaments with jingling bells adorned her ankles;
The Mother looked beauteous with these jewels. . . .
Since the Mother owns the three worlds of earth, heaven, and hell,
How can we describe her jewels and ornaments? [36, translation modified]

She took off the tassel of pearls from her hair
And from her bosom the fine silk
Embroidered with gold and gems
The Mother unfastened her netted waistband
of gemstones and jewels;
Unhooked from her ears
the large diamond danglers;
She removed her jade and gold necklace. . . .
How can I describe the other ornaments?
Piled together in the darkness, where she discarded them,
They burn like a raging fire, producing a joyless light.
"Keep them," she said to the Lord,
"They are now yours, O Friend of the Destitute."
[N 53–54 / D 738, translation modified]

What these two passages emblematize, especially when juxtaposed, is a series of questions about the metaphysics of identity. They raise worries about which of our possessions and properties are really ours, which ones are essential and which ones external and adventitious. For those who believe in the sanctity of traditional identities, such passages raise troubling questions about belonging and ownership, about inner vs. outer: jewels that look as natural as flowers in a garden can look like ornaments that merely decorate (or worse, even hide an inner flaw). The passages suggest that our identities are contextual, and that we have the power to make and remake them in the light of our changing ethical and political commitments. Our identities, the Goddess Lakshmi suggests, can serve the dominant patriarchal order, and they can challenge it as well. The denuding, the willed discarding of jewels and ornaments, is in itself the creation of a new self. The fiery harshness ("dau dau") of the discarded ornaments points simultaneously to the death of one identity and the new one that the death makes possible. Lakshmi's action draws attention to the power involved in remaking our inner selves—the willed askesis enables the full flowering of the goddess as a fighter, the goddess who not only serves the lowliest social creatures, the chandalas, but also identifies herself as one and fights alongside them.[19]

The lowly creature most directly associated with the goddess is of course her outcaste devotee, Sriya, her name a derivation from one of the goddess's most ancient names: Sri. The connotations of the name—beauty, divine grace—are visible in the way Sriya performs her social duty, since she transforms even menial work into a form of mindful worship: she "swept clean the streets . . . with rapturous devotion for the Lord" [45]. Before the goddess appears in Sriya's chandala neighborhood on the outskirts of the city, she is struck by images of indolence and somnolence. Young and old women of the upper castes, half asleep, clothes in disarray, contrast sharply with Sriya, who is a model of hard work and mindful devotion. Her glory ("mahima"), we are told, is not yet visible ("agochara") to the gods, but she works quietly and attentively. Her worship is no empty ritual, for we see in the description the stirrings of subjectivity. In the middle of her ritual worship of Lakshmi, she grows restive but then continues, arranging and decorating her altar: "[Sriya] drew murals on the floor of her house with raw rice paste. She drew an in-tricate lotus motif with sixteen petals. She lighted an earthen lamp that had ten mouths to hold ten wicks, and placed it at the center of the mural. On this mural she placed fruits and tubers of ten colors. . . . *Her mind drifted, grew restless*; she went to get more raw rice and some holy duba grass . . ." [46; translation modified, my emphasis]. Sriya is depicted as a conscious and attentive devotee, with believable psychological traits. Her ritual worship is not routine or

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mechanical; she brings mindfulness to both work and worship, and occasionally struggles to keep her mind on her tasks. This sign of human failing makes her devotion more endearing, and her work more meaningful. It accentuates the attitude of willed surrender she brings to what she does, the attitude of *sraddha,* which can transform work into worship, a routine menial job into selfless service.

These are the very attitudes—humility and joy in service and work—that the goddess herself embodies in the *Lakshmi Purana.* This is evident in some of the most telling descriptions we have in the text: that of Lakshmi preparing her new home to serve and feed the two hungry brothers who have finally arrived at her house.

Lakshmi cleaned the whole palace
with her own hands.
She sprinkled the house
with camphor and oil of sandalwood.
She assembled for her guests utensils made of gold:
platters, plates, quarter-plates, bowls, and quarter-bowls.
She also arranged basins for the rinsing of their hands
and tubs for washing their feet,
as is the practice of the two Lords
when they are offered the bhog.
She made and spread out
two mats of pure gold,
where the brothers will sit and have their food.
Then the Mother pleaded with her maids:
"Go and usher in my Lords . . . go, hurry!" [69–70]

This attitude of service represents more than forgiveness. It shows us how to value the work we do in our everyday lives—even the work delegated to women and the lowly classes of the world. When we see the thematic links between the goddess and the chandaluni, Sri and Sriya, the picture of women's work points to a generalizable value. It is the valorization of the ordinary, the everyday, the socially marginal—that which is taken for granted. The goddess shows us how such work can be both humble and grand; in fact, we see this most clearly when Sri and Sriya fuse together in our line of vision. The lowly Sriya, whose "mahima" or glory was hitherto undetected, is elevated by Lakshmi's divine blessings. The material blessings she asks for hesitantly ("I don't know what to ask for, My Goddess, since I have never learned how to ask for boons") appear in a form that celebrates both the doer and the ideal of a deed well done. Sriya herself becomes a generative metaphor of wealth and plenty, of abundance: her hut, "which resembled a wasp's burrow" turns into a "palace" made of fragrant sandalwood; the granary that had no rice is now stacked with gold; her childless home is now filled with "five sons." In the course of one day in divine time, Sriya's human world is profoundly transformed. The invisible toiler is now recognized as "bhagyavati," or "the woman of good fortune," her house now the blessed center of a universe of abundance.[20] The work done by the lowly is lifted up to divine gaze, given the universal recognition it so richly deserves.

The connections established between Sri and Sriya, goddess and devotee, are even more intimate. In another text, the "Kamalalochona Chautisa," Balaram Das calls the Goddess Lakshmi "Sriya." "Sriyadevi," the Goddess Lakshmi, is identified as the consort of Lord Vishnu (or Jagannath). The Lord is "Sriyadevinka manohara," dear to the goddess's heart.[21] The interchangeability of Sri and Sriya, the goddess and the outcaste woman, supports the *Lakshmi Purana*'s ideological emphasis on what modern feminist theory calls "women's work." Our sixteenth-century text performs the audacious and counter hegemonic task of valuing that which is socially invisible ("agochara"); it also refines our understanding of all work, all socially meaningful work, by emphasizing its subjective dimension. While on one level Das's Goddess Lakshmi speaks to the women of every Oriya household about their domestic duties, on another level she directs her challenging questions at all members of Orissan society, men and women, the upper and the lower castes. The primary literary device that enables the second level to do its work is the poetic emphasis on identities, on how they are constructed and how they are remade. In the striking passages about the goddess's ornaments and jewelry, Lakshmi seems to celebrate her own identity as wife and goddess, and then to openly disown part of it. Her new identifications, her solidarities, are also clearly suggested: the text links her to her foremost devotee, Sriya, as well as to a whole class of lowly workers, the substratum of society. The poetic—in particular, metaphorical—connections among the various actors consolidate the philosophical redefinition of identity in terms of action rather than social ascription, or karma rather than dharma. The individual self is extricated from entanglements of caste and social station as the self of the doer and the devotee. The *Lakshmi Purana* may well represent a major stage in the articulation of a subjectivity that is disembedded from caste and class, and available in principle to all human agents, not limited to gods and goddesses.

Part of the poetic achievement of Balaram Das's text is that it performs a series of powerful displacements, spatial as well as political, of which lord to outcaste is perhaps the most startling one. The typical trajectory of these displacements can be traced by following one

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humble word, the colloquial Oriya adjective "bai." It appears most prominently when Jagannath chides Lakshmi after she returns to the temple. He reminds her that she is, after all, popularly known among the ordinary people of Orissa as the "bai thakurani," the "crazy" or "fickle" goddess ("thakurani": goddess). Fickleness is of course the stereotype that would commonly be applied to the goddess of fortune, but what Jagannath is referring to in the context of the narrative is also her impatience, her restiveness, her desire to wander—to go beyond the boundaries of the temple complex, and to cross traditional lines of separation that another goddess (any woman, for that matter) would be reluctant to violate. The colloquial Oriya word "bai" is derived from the tatsama word "Bayu" or wind (from the Sanskrit Vayu), and its semantic migration to suggest restlessness, fickleness, and even errancy are perfectly natural. After all, Lakshmi herself claims the right to wander: to leave the sacred space of the temples to visit the world outside where she will serve, teach, and mingle—with everyone from the lowliest insect to the lords of the world.

But very soon we notice that the adjective "bai" itself wanders within the confines of the text. When Sriya asks for boons, the goddess lovingly chides her for being "bai": "How can you so *bai,* my dear Sriya," she says, "as to want immortality, something that is impossible for me to give you?" (She can grant boons of wealth and fame, even happiness after her death—but granting a human immortality is beyond even her power.) The slightly pejorative adjective becomes an affectionate term when used by the goddess, suggesting that the qualities it denotes are not so negative after all. It is natural for humans to want more, to ask for things that are not (yet) possible. In our human world, it may be good to stray a bit, to go beyond the bounds of what is given, what is traditionally accepted and understood. Later in the text, the adjective returns playfully, with the pejorative connotations intact, but this time attached to Lord Jagannath. When the two brothers appear at Lakshmi's palace, hungry and desperate, Jagannath explains to the servant women how they are suffering because of what they did to his wife. The women, who know who the brothers are and what issues are at stake, pretend they do not, and mock him: "Don't be *bai,* you old Brahmin, why should a man suffer just because he drove his wife out of his house?" Here "bai" means something like the colloquial "daft" or "silly," and part of the point is to get the Lord to confess how much he values Lakshmi, how much he needs her. But this is achieved by transferring the adjective "bai" from her to him, which would be a startlingly rude thing to do to the Lord if we had not already come to hear the word used affectionately by the goddess to describe her devotee.

Remaking Tradition and the Individual

It is in the context of such semantic and thematic displacements that we approach the radical demand at the end. When Lakshmi demands that everyone, Brahmin or chandala, be treated as equal within the precincts of the temple, and the Lord agrees to it, that newly sanctioned practice of the various castes eating together—customary even to this day in Puri—is itself the visionary product of Balaram Das's wanderings. It is a bold statement defying caste hierarchy, and it makes the Lord invite the outcaste into the symbolically powerful inner world of the Puri temple complex. This is the political value the goddess wishes to exemplify, indeed to embody, for the world outside the temple's boundaries, Hindu society in general. The temple courtyard where food is shared now becomes a counterhegemonic space sanctioned by divine law, by the word of the Lord. But this law is of course new, and its origins can be traced not only to the word of Lord Jagannath but also to the goddess's questioning, restive, reformative spirit. The new law owes its existence to the community of the outcastes and women that the goddess embodies, a community of the subaltern that lies beyond the traditional purview of Brahminically controlled divine law. It is wandering, and even errancy, that takes us beyond the law of tradition to produce a new and more humane law. It is perhaps appropriate, then, that Balaram Das leaves it open whether the male Lord himself quite comprehends what is at stake in the change.[22] It is enough for our purposes that the Lord will (have to) listen to us, for the *Lakshmi Purana*'s ultimate message is that the transformation of the world is primarily our own responsibility, primarily up to us. The Lord is humanized in the narrative, but it is the female reader (of the vrata katha) who is elevated to the status of agent, of doer. Women ask, demand, act—and that is how we get the Lord (and the lords of the world) to change the way things are.[23] In this powerful text written some five hundred years ago, the image of Hindu tradition is transformed, since it is made accountable to the contingent present, just as male gods are to eccentric goddesses, Brahmins to *bai* outcastes.

The transformed image of Hindu tradition can be traced in part through the semantic and ideological unsettling of the notion of karma. The *Lakshmi Purana* marks a certain ambiguity in the meaning of work and duty, even as it brings about a radical transformation of

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caste-based evaluations and perceptions by valorizing the work done by women and all lowly workers. For work done with sincerity and devotion is not enough to challenge an unjust social structure, since it may simply be ritual work devoted to one's ascribed station in life. The new attitude to work may ensure that the unjust social system will function more smoothly, making the lowly workers content with their lot. This is why, for all her importance, Sriya cannot by herself be the central agent in Balaram Das's narrative. It is both Sriya and her Goddess Sri who together form the more complete image of the new social agent and outline a new notion of karma. Dutiful work can serve the caste order of society, but the goddess suggests the principle that part of our duty is to wander, to question, and to challenge—just as she challenges patriarchal will and tradition, as well as her own identities. Karma thus includes the intentional act of questioning the world around us. The world is of course not always apart from us, outside the self, but often implicated in the way we view ourselves, our roles, our identities. In unmaking her identity as the bohu and goddess of the temple and remaking it to suit the new context, the new egalitarian ideals, Balaram Das's radical goddess shows how self-(re)making is an important component of social critique. The critique—and redefinition—of social identity is part of the work, the dutiful karma, that the goddess posits as the source of dharma or virtue. Sri and Sriya together complete the new conception of karma that is suggested in Achyutananda Das's "Bipra Chalaka": dharma or virtue derives from intentional action based on a critical awareness. Just as ritual worship is made mindful through conscious effort in the *Lakshmi Purana,* social existence is itself made meaningful through the principle of critique. Karma and inherited social roles (the traditional meaning of dharma) are here wrenched apart; what emerges as an alternative to ascribed identity is the thinking, questioning, critical self—something close to the modern ideal of the individual whose value does not depend on social status but rather on what she or he chooses to do, on intentional action. It should not come as a surprise that these semantic and ideological reversals would be close to the heart of Balaram Das, the self-declared sudra writer. Drawing on a remarkably diverse intellectual tradition, Balaram Das and the panchasakha attempt a critical synthesis and envision a social revolution through their narratives, songs, and dramatic performances.

My analysis of the rise of the notion of a self-aware individuality (grounded in the capacity for social evaluation and criticism) in a sixteenth-century Oriya text complements the work of historians and literary critics who have been tracing the development of similarly "modern" themes in precolonial Indian literature.[24] Focusing on Telugu and Tamil literary works from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, these scholars have suggested how a modern historical practice develops in forms that are traditionally considered literary, and they have based their analysis of precolonial modernity—in particular secular values, historical consciousness, and a nonreligious sensuousness tied to a new experience of the body—on the rise of a new socioeconomic class, the karanams, which was educated and socially mobile. What these analyses suggest is that we need to reread medieval Indian vernacular literature through new lenses, looking in particular at the way traditional religious idioms are being deployed for novel explorations. New questions are being asked during this transitional period, from new perspectives, and new social values are being explored. Medieval Indian literatures reveal a picture of a dynamic society in flux, a very different image from the one we have inherited from James Mill. And the view of modernity that emerges in them is at odds with the capitalist modernity that dominates in the European context. Much work needs to be done on literary and non-literary texts from this period before we can generalize usefully, but the central questions suggested by such analyses as mine are tantalizing ones. What would a critical and selfaware individuality look like if it were not tethered to capitalist values? The emergence of individuality in the texts and discourses I have examined reveals what has been called a "disembedding" from primordial commitments [see Taylor]; it begins to conceptualize individual actions as logically prior to, and not dependent on, ascribed social duty. Similarly, in this new perspective, self-making and remaking are fundamental to social critique. A new radical identity politics based on the solidarity of the subaltern groups challenges the hegemonic identity constructs of Brahminical ideologies, specifically of varna and caste. Is it possible to see in these new cultural imaginings a noninstrumental form of rationality, a new set of generalizable critical principles through which the poor and the marginalized challenge unjustified power and authorize their own insurgency? How do we understand the role the social struggles of oppressed groups have played in the development of such universal modern values as egalitarianism and individuality? The pursuit of these far-reaching questions calls for research that is both comparative and multidisciplinary, and I hope to have suggested through my analysis of one medieval Indian narrative that literary criticism can play a crucial role in shaping such a project.

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Notes

1. Puri has traditionally been one of the major Indian centers of Hinduism, both as a site of pilgrimage and, especially in the precolonial period, as a space for intellectual exchange among various religious traditions. Its main deity, Lord Jagannath ("Lord of the Universe"), originated in tribal cultures but was gradually Hinduized. The temple complex we see today was built in the twelfth century. Puri, and Orissa in general, have been researched and written about extensively in recent decades; for a sampling of the most impressive body of work, see the collections *Cult of Jagannath*, and *Jagannath Revisited.*
2. This unpublished poem is quoted by Mallik; see *Medieval Orissa* 44. The orthodox Brahminical notion of dharma as tied to varna is articulated most famously by Lord Krishna in chapter 2, verse 31, of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Buddhism provided egalitarian and universalist alternatives to this Brahminical interpretation of dharma, and since medieval Orissan society had a strong Buddhist cultural tradition it is likely that Achyutananda Das was drawing on it. Also see note 16, below. Santina provides a critique of Krishna's Brahminical view of dharma and karma, as expressed in chapter 2 of the *Gita*.
3. For a brief account of Achyutanda Das and the panchasakha as mystics and thinkers, see C.Das, *Studies*. Mallik's *Paradigms* provides a more comprehensive and detailed historical account, with an emphasis on the Oriya sudra muni tradition, which began with Sarala Das. On Balaram Das, see C. Das, *Balaram*. Unlike many Indian writers of the period, Sarala Das and the panchasakha did not have court patronage. They were almost all from the lower castes, and the one Brahmin in the group—Jagannath Das—sided with the lower castes in his writings. The name "Das" or "Dasa" (which means slave or servant) was used by them and other Indian writers to disown their caste identity; they saw themselves as servants of the Lord and hence less accountable to kings and priests. The collection *Tradition and Modernity* is an excellent introduction to the bhakti movement, although it is selective in its coverage of regional trends.
4. A good brief introduction to the classical puranas is Narayana Rao's "Purana"; Rocher provides extensive summaries and a comprehensive analysis of the genre. On the ideological function of the puranas in at least one regional context, see Chakrabarti. As a narrative, Balaram Das's text differs from the Sanskrit models, which were sprawling baggy monstrosities; he deals with gods and goddesses and provides an origin myth, but his narrative structure is tightly organized, almost like a modern short story. He incorporates the traditional content of the puranas into the more focused form of the vrata katha (see note 6, below). Since vrata kathas were meant to be read ritually by women, this choice was politically and strategically quite astute.
5. The *Lakshmi Purana* is not a translation or transcreation of an existing model in Sanskrit, although it may have drawn on oral traditions. Das's Oriya text is very popular and can be found on the web at: http://www.odia.org/books/LaxmiPurana.pdf. No critical editions exist, but there are two translations into English. The first is an excerpt, translated by Rajendra Prasad Das; see Balarama Das, "Lakshmi." The second is the complete text, published in 2007 [Balaram Das, Lakshmi]. I rely mainly on the second translation, done by Lipipuspa Nayak, modifying it in many places. Citations to the Nayak translation are indicated with an N and the Das translation with a D.
6. Vrata kathas were didactic texts that were meant to teach devotees how to observe ritual fasts and worship individual deities. These were generic texts that contained detailed instructions and also provided a katha, or story, whose message explained why the deity should be worshipped and what boons he or she can give (or withhold).
7. The notion that precolonial Indian society was static and unchanging after the ancient period originates with James Mill. Mill influenced not only colonial officials but also thinkers like Marx, among others. For a brief introductory discussion of medieval Indian historiography in this context, see Talbot 1–4.
8. There is a vast (and somewhat confusing) body of recent work on the notion of colonial and alternative modernities. A helpful survey of some basic questions is Dube and Banerjee-Dube's introduction to *Unbecoming Modern;* that collection and *Alternative Modernities* convey a sense of the range of issues involved. Chakarabarty's is an influential account, and his title *Provincializing Europe* provides a nonnativist flag under which students of all cultures can rally. Taylor's *Modern*, building on his nonrelativist philosophical approach, has cleared the ground for nonethnocentric comparative studies. On historical consciousness in precolonial India, see *Textures of Time;* see also Subrahmanyam. A good summary of the issues in the Indian context is provided in Narayana Rao, "Play" [see note 24, below].
9. Chandala was a generally pejorative term used for groups that were beneath even the sudras, the lowest of the four varnas. Chandalas were outcastes, often drawn from aboriginal tribes and relegated to the lowest economic strata of traditional Hindu society. The sage Parashara is the narrator of many puranas. Balaram Das uses this convention, even though his vernacular purana does not follow many other generic conventions of the classical puranas [for a description of these conventions, see Narayana Rao, "Purana" 99].
10. See Eschmann, "Hinduization" and "Prototypes." G. N. Dash provides a methodologically complex and illuminating analysis of how the temple rituals have themselves been shaped over the centuries by struggles among various kinds of priests, especially those of tribal origin and those from the upper castes.
11. *Jati* is the word that corresponds to caste; the earlier word varna is closer to "station in life" (based on occupation), since it is not as rigidly determined by birth. Jaiswal's study is an excellent historical and conceptual guide to the phenomenon of caste.
12. For a discussion of a purana devoted to Assam's famous Tantric goddess Kamakhya Devi, see Biernacki. On the mangalkavya tradition in Bengal, devoted to the local village goddesses Manasa and Chandi, see Clark; Chakrabarti. In Orissa, Sarala Das wrote his *Chandi Purana* in the fifteenth century, but it is very different in tone from Balaram Das's text devoted to Lakshmi. For Oriya texts devoted to the goddess Mangala, see Apffel-Marglin and Mishra. The Oriya *Lakshmi Purana* builds on the feminist genre devoted to strong

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tribal and tantric goddesses, but changes it drastically by focusing on a classical goddess and by developing universalist ethical notions.

13. See Dhal for a fairly comprehensive account of the literature devoted to Lakshmi.
14. Tatsama words, favored by the educated elites, were vernacular words derived from Sanskrit and changed only very slightly.
15. In other words, this is a vernacular formulation of ideas that are cosmopolitan in reach. Pollock has done valuable work on the idea of Sanskrit and vernacular "cosmopolitanisms," and he suggests new ways to analyze vernacularization and the role of literature across regional and national contexts.
16. Even though I have not found hard textual evidence for this, I think it is very likely that the Oriya panchasakha writers are echoing the southern Indian anticaste movement called "virasaivism," which originated in Karnataka in the twelfth century and became a popular social force there and in Andhra. One of the founders of virasaivism was the Kannada saint Basava, who was born a Brahmin but attacked the Brahminical ideology of varna and caste. Worshippers of Lord ùiva, the virasaivas were unorthodox in their approach to worship and social life. They questioned notions of dharma based on social rank and emphasized the importance of work done with devotion. Their main literary form was the *vacana*, a short poem through which a "saying" could be conveyed (vacana literally means "saying"). For a basic historical account of virasaivism, see Desai, and for a discussion of doctrine, Malledevaru. Examples of vacanas can be found in Ramanujan, and for an unusual Telugu text, a purana celebrating virasaiva saints, see Narayana Rao, *ùiva's Warriors* (both Ramanujan and Narayana Rao provide good introductions to their texts and provide useful general background). On the theme of the dignity of work in virasaiva thought, see Michael. In my view, Balaram Das's *Lakshmi Purana* combines the southern Indian virasaiva tradition with the Sakta or goddess tradition that had a strong presence in Orissa (Sarala Das's fifteenth century *Chandi Purana* is the most prominent textual evidence of the latter).
17. Talbot talks about the "fluidity of social identities" in medieval Andhra and elsewhere [84–86 and ff.] and provides lucid discussions of issues in medieval Indian historiography [esp.1–17; 208–15].
18. Contrast this muted description with, for instance, the Sri Sukta in the Rig Veda, the earliest invocation of the goddess, where she is described more precisely using the following Sanskrit adjectives: she is (among many other things) *jvalanti*, lustrous like fire, and yasti, slim and slender; she is described as *padmavarna:* she has the color of the lotus flower. For a complete translation and some discussion, see Dhal 47–62.
19. In my view, the willed making and unmaking of identities is often an implicitly rational response to changing contexts, and so identities, while constructed, are not thereby arbitrary. New identity choices are justified when they are based on an accurate understanding of changing social relations and political needs, and of the values and principles that are most appropriate for those needs. This view of the transformation of identities is similar to the approach defended in the collection Reclaiming Identity and by Babbitt. This essay on the *Lakshmi Purana* can be read in part as an extension of the "realist" theory of identity I have been elaborating since the early 1990s [see Mohanty, "Epistemic Status"; *Literary Theory*, chapter 7].
20. Given the textual cues, it would be hard to miss the metaphorical nature of the boon of abundance that the goddess grants Sriya. Lakshmi is associated with not only material wealth but also spiritual grace, with the fulfillment of human desires, actual and ideal. So it is significant that Sriya's house is not made of marble, which would be the sign of a rich person's palace, but rather of scented sandalwood, whose paste is said to have calming properties and is always part of Hindu ritual worship. Similarly, while she did not have rice to eat before, her house is now "stacked with pure gold" (*suddha . . . subarna*); she had no sons, and now has five. Sriya is now a creative, generative center, not unlike her goddess, who is traditionally described as hiranyamayi, radiant like gold, as well as udara, noble and bountiful.
21. I thank G. N. Dash for this reference.
22. All that we hear from Lord Jagannath is that he acknowledges Lakshmi's power and glory after having been humiliated by her; he endorses the practice of intercaste mingling in the temple courtyard but says nothing about its significance [see N 74–75].
23. How much the lords of the world listen or yield to us is of course a historically contingent and contextual matter. An analysis of the changes in the practice of caste-intermixing within the Puri temple would be valuable, especially if it follows the multidisciplinary methodological model Dash provides for his analysis of struggles within the priestly community. Another valuable project would examine the way the *Lakshmi Purana* has been deployed in subaltern social mobilizations over the ages. This would also involve tracking the shifting power relations in the general polity (the British, for instance, gave more power to the Brahmin priests than the priests had before—for strategic administrative reasons [see Mubayi, esp. 152–90; for an important related account, see Kulke, Kings, esp. 1–136].
24. Narayana Rao, "Play," provides a brief summary that is worth quoting in some detail: Shulman and I . . . have demonstrated that modernity in [Telugu] literature was already flourishing during the period from the late fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The colonial modernity that had its beginning with the British rule in India is certainly a different kind of modernity, but it is not the only modernity known to Indian literature. Colonial modernity is perhaps most easily defined by what it is not: it is not "traditional." It rejects the immediate past and presents itself as distinctly different from it. . . . In contrast, precolonial modernity does not define itself as a radical break from the past nor does it deny the significance of the past. It continues the tradition but marks a shift in sensibilities. . . . [160–61] Narayana Rao is talking about how literature thematizes and represents social modernity, and his critique is directed at the colonialist bias, often seen in nineteenth-century Indian reformers aswell, that sees the precolonial past (in particular, the four centuries leading up to the nineteenth) as the dark ages. Such a bias derives from ignorance about the details of cultural and social history,Narayana Rao and his colleagues would argue, and it discourages revisionary historical analysis.

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Burden of the Past: U. R. Anantha Murthy's *Samskara*

SATISH C. AIKANT

Ever since its first publication in 1965 Anantha Murthy's novel *Samskara* has generated considerable debate. Several critics, in particular the Kannada critics, perceived the novel as a criticism of Hinduism and a frontal attack on Brahminic dogma. There were others who felt uneasy about the modernistic perspective of the author on a social reality which was merely culture-specific. Murthy, they alleged, was trying to universalise a personal experience - the crisis faced by a brahmin priest, which was by no stretch of imagination a universal existential angst. Ramanujan's first translation of it in English, a decade later (1976), served two purposes: it enlarged the readership of the novel and suggested a new way of reading it – foregrounding as he did in his 'Afterword,' the allegorical dimension of the novel which had been obscured by the acrimonious debates in the Kannada literary circles. The critical consensus which has emerged over the years is that to consider *Samskara* merely as a realistic novel dealing with a socio-historic problem would, is simplistic, and a reductive enterprise.

It has also been argued that Anantha Murthy in the writing of this novel was trying to come to terms with his own complex realities rooted in the Madhava Brahmin traditions of rural Karnataka. 'The writing itself can be viewed as a 'samskara,' a rite of expiation, or *prayaschita*, to atone for the oppressive practices of Brahminism when its orthodoxies were being interrogated in the reformist climate of the 1930s and 40s.'[1] Seen in this light, it becomes imperative to locate Anantha Murthy's relationship to his brahminism, his choice of Kannada as his creative medium, despite his professional involvement in English literature, and more importantly, the need to use the contemporary experimental mode of modernism to examine existentialist conflicts in the traditional rural society of Karnataka.

Murthy, of course, was exposed through his education and outlook to the influences of Western modes of perception such as Modernism, Existentialism, Liberalism and Marxism. And the unease he felt with the codified and rigid Hindu society that he knew only too well is expressed in his novels, in particular, *Samskara* and *Bharathiputra*.

In a paper titled 'Search for an identity – A Viewpoint of a Kannada Writer' Anantha Murthy articulates the problems of contemporary writing in the Indian languages. Writing in Kannada which has a literary history dating back to a thousand years, Murthy was trying to reflect on the newly emerging identity of an Indian writer faced by conflicting legacy of a cultural tradition with the present day reality. The orthodox writers or the so called 'insiders' were those who 'grew a tuft, wore caste marks, chewed betel, and more often than not, came from a rural background. Along with their Gandhian idealism, their sensibilities bore the distinctive features of their castes and regions and they wrote as if the English education, they receive was inconsequential.'[2] Murthy himself later agreed that his categorical description was too simplistic but the essential point being made was that while he admires the insiders' in-depth knowledge of Indian tradition he is forced to reject 'their celebratory attitude towards Indian traditionalism.'[3] They were restricted to their use of conservative aesthetic modes while the modern writer was more inventive and took the liberty of experimenting with new techniques and forms. What was, however, essential was a certain 'rootedness' into one's past if not exactly into the classical Indian tradition.

One may argue that this concept of 'rootledness' within the Indian tradition is a rather problematic issue. The insider/outsider conflict needs to be addressed at a much broader level, and for someone like Murthy writing in the post independence era, the issue is a complex one. While admitting to western influences, and the need to break out of a traditionalist mould, he also acknowledges

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the fact that the language a writer uses automatically ensures its own compulsions on him and his work. A language like Kannada is kept alive and vibrant, not just by its huge body of literary works, but also by its oral tradition as well as the folklore of the illiterate rural masses. The resultant language, 'created by the peculiar congruence of indigenous and Sanskrit classical traditions, folk traditions and now the impact of spreading Western education,'[4] is no longer limited to its classical preserves, but moves on to become a part of a living tradition which is constantly redefined and renegotiated. A writer while he is engaged in the creative process not only further shapes the language but is also shaped by it. He thus becomes very much a part of the living tradition of that language, that is, an insider. By virtue of the fact that all his experiences, his past and his present coalesce into an immediate contemporary reality, his identity is constituted anew and he no longer remains an 'outsider' to the tradition. He, indeed, acquires a composite Indian identity.It is interesting as it is significant that *Samskara*, originally written in Kannada, when translated into English by A. K. Ramanujan, not only resulted in wider readership, but it also began to be related to the discourse of modernity, even though its plot and characterisation were firmly rooted in the realities of a regional and traditional culture.

Hinduism with its rigid brahminical codes, not only informs the theological background of the text but is also central to the problematic of the novel. Appropriation of the brahminical superiority amongst the Hindu castes goes back to the creation of the universe, according to the *Rig Veda*. Brahminical hegemony was maintained by a strict adherence to customs and rituals formulated, so as to ensure the absolute untainted purity of the caste, and this could only be done by adhering to a scrupulous code of conduct. Notions of purity and pollution formed the mainstay of the caste system.

Murthy's Brahmin agrahara in *Samskara* is defined by its rigidity, lack of spontaneity and growth. It has an unenlightened Brahmin population who are mostly driven by greed and superstition, but it also has a man like Praneshacharya who rises above the rest. As a 'critical insider' Murthy can expose the limitations of the orthodox caste and class defined identity, without going as far as V. S. Naipaul, who, as an outsider, found *Samskara* as nothing but stressing upon the obscurantism of 'a barbaric civilization.'[5] Murthy's socialist leanings perhaps account for his negative attitude towards the ossified community of Brahmins and, like Jagannatha in *Bharathiputra*, his attempt is to dismantle the caste system, in order to ensure equality and dignity to all sections of society, which could only be done by breaking the barriers which separated them. *Samskara* is seen as an attempt to 'give convincing form to unformulated conflicts, helping to re-ritualise human endeavours which have been rigidified by ritualism.'[6] Murthy initiates a contestation of what constitutes Brahminism through Praneshacharya, the spiritual leader of the agrahara Durvasapura.

Critics such as S. Nagarajan find the author's attitude to Brahminism somewhat ambiguous. Their question essentially is this -is the critique of Hinduism, the author's or the protagonist's? The question has been repeatedly raised in the context of this novel but we must understand that a certain degree of ambivalence is what characterises a 'modern' novel. Such ambivalence is perhaps ingrained in modernity itself. Nagarajan's reading is that though the initial portrayal of Praneshacharya is imbued with irony, the irony gradually recedes as the protagonist's spiritual progress takes final shape. This suggests that 'we begin with a figure who is set up as the central character of the novel but who becomes the central consciousness of the novel as the novel develops. This shift in the point of view makes it more than likely that the repudiation of Brahminism is the author's with the character serving as his agent in this respect.'[7] As an individual whose identity is defined by his caste, the separation of the 'essential self' from the societal role, an act easy enough for its modernist author, may be quite inconceivable for Praneshacharya. It is precisely because he is rooted both in terms of social space and identity in his Brahmin status that the multiple complexities of the social and individual crises could not have moved him away from his essential self.

Praneshacharya's brahminism extends beyond the normal parameters and his self-enforced celibacy is a manifestation of his excessive zeal for purity. According to Hindu belief, life is divided into four 'ashrams' which are essential parts of a pre-ordained 'dharma'- 'brahmacharya,' 'grahasta,' 'vanaprastha' and 'sanyasa.' In keeping with this tradition a man acquires learning in the brahmacharya ashrama, and in the early part of grahastya, he enjoys *artha* and *kama*. It is only when he has experienced both sensuality along with other material and spiritual pursuits that he is ready to withdraw from his worldly duties. 'In accordance with the precepts of the *Veda* and the Smriti, the householder is declared to be superior to all of them: for he supports the other three. As all rivers, both great and small, find a resting place in the ocean, even so men of all orders find protection with householders.'[8] It is therefore maintained that, a 'man's neglect of as fundamental an aspect of life as sensuality (*kama*) leaves him incomplete in the fulfilment of dharma.'[9] Praneshacharya's decision to wilfully forego the householder stage is thus not in keeping with the

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traditional Hindu way of life. This decision to test his ability to renounce more than what dharma enjoins, almost amounts to hubris. Even Louis Dumont in an essay on world renunciation posits the caste society of the householder as a holistic universe against the renouncer as the individual outside of society.[10] Despite all his virtue, the Acharya suffers from the limitation of not adhering completely to the dharma of a brahmin priest who also happens to be a householder.

A brief summary of the plot may be useful before the text is analysed further. The novel is divided into three parts. The first part introduces the static agrahara and its rigid ritual-bound life now troubled by the death of one renegade inhabitant, Naranappa. The second part is set in the forest, away from the stultifying structure of society where Praneshacharya has re-birth through a sexual encounter. The third part is a journey, a common motif in the allegorical mode because during a journey a man's destiny is fluid, undefined by the collective norms of specific communities.

The novel begins with the death of Naranappa, a brahmin of the Durvasapura agrahara, who throughout his life had desecrated his brahminism. The brahmins of the agrahara now face an unprecedented dilemma - who should perform the last rites or 'samskara' for Naranappa? The fundamental question is, should one who rejected his brahminism in life, be treated as a brahmin in death? The question occupies centre stage as no daily functions can be performed as long as there is an un-cremated body in the agrahara. No one can eat in this unclean state. Since Naranappa, though not excommunicated, was a non-practicing brahmin, so that whoever performs the rites may be contaminated by the act. Whereas the structures of that brahminic world seem to decompose as inevitably as Naraappa's corpse rotting in the heat, the inner self of the hero, as we shall see, unfolds.

As the problem is being discussed, we gain revealing insights into the character of the various people involved. Besides the dominant wish to maintain their ritual purity and orthodox superiority the behaviour of the brahmins expresses envy, jealousy, greed and even deceit. At first, nobody wants to compromise himself by cremating the dubious corpse. But when Chandri, with whom Naranappa had been living, offers her gold ornaments to cover the costs, one after the other the brahmins overcome their hesitation and secretly sneak into the Acharya's house to put forward their claims. The brahmins are greedy, gluttonous, mean-spirited: they love gold, betray orphans and widows; and even though they cannot follow their dharma properly, they look down on Naranappa because he openly lived his anti-brahminical ways and yet are jealous of his every forbidden pleasure.

For Praneshacharya, the 'Crest- Jewel of Vedic Learning,' as he is called, Naranappa's death has raised questions for his community that cannot be ignored but which have no easy answers. His challenge to Praneshacharya teases and torments him and leads to a series of crises that go far beyond Praneshachrya's control, in metaphysical terms.

To get out of his predicament Praneshacharya turns to the scriptures for an answer, but despite his learning and wisdom he fails to get any direction that would help resolve the issue. In despair he leaves for the temple of Maruti, in the forest, in quest of a solution. Meanwhile the uncremated body begins to rot and a stench permeates the village. He waits, in vain, for a flower to fall from the Maruti's idol, a 'sign' of divine intercession. In utter dejection Praneshacharya starts to walk back toward the village.

Crossing the forest, he chances upon Chandri, the mistress of the deceased, who has all the while been waiting nearby for the Acharya's announcement of the god's decision. Persecuted and despised by the other brahmin families of the village, she sees Praneshacharya as her only ally and hope. But when he appears before her, helpless and sad, she is overcome by compassion and tenderness for him. She falls at his feet. When he is about to bless her, Chandri touches him unintentionally. The situation undergoes a sudden change, unleashing emotions which are triggered by Chandri's touch. The blessing the Acharya was to utter in Sanskrit sticks in his throat. Instead, he starts caressing her. The touch of this woman leads to a kind of breakdown. He suddenly becomes aware of his emotional and physical hunger and desperately shouts 'Amma.' In the arms of Chandri, who supports him and feeds him bananas, he turns into a child. Then they embrace each other.

The movement of the narrative in the novel is from stasis to a climactic high point i.e., an epiphanic moment opening out to a state of heightened consciousness, that no longer accepts a prescriptive and codified existence. The act of transgression is an indirect consequence of the despair that had set in when Praneshacharya failed to find a solution to the problem which threatens to engulf the agrahara in its wake. When Praneshacharya awakens in Chandri's lap he is no longer the same person. It seems as if 'having exiled 'Kama' from his house and family, he had to find it outside his customary space, in the forest; his sense of dharma had to be undone and remade by it.'[11] Yet the act itself can be perceived as rediscovery or a

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're-birth' of Praneshacharya : 'It felt as though he'd turned over and fallen into his childhood, lying in his mother's lap and finding rest there after great fatigue.'[12]

The second part of the novel begins with Praneshacharya's guilt and remorse at his transgression and his breaking of the caste taboos. He returns to the village and, despite his desire to confess about his state of pollution, he is unable to tell the people so. Chandri, meanwhile, gets the body cremated with the help of a Muslim friend. Plague visits the agrahara, and as the brahmins leave the village one after the other, Praneshacharya's wife passes away. Her death provides Praneshacharya a 'freedom from obligation' and he leaves the agrahara after performing her last rites, unable to confront the other brahmins with his act with Chandri. He sets out impulsively on an aimless journey, searching for the direction of his further life.

Praneshcharya's fallibility, seen as an aberration from a conservative perspective, results in social transgression, and yet his breakdowncould be seen as all too human. The act, however, has multiple implications in terms of purity / pollution rules. Chandri is a low caste woman; Praneshwaracharya, apart from being a householder and priest, is ritually unclean because Naranappa's body lies un-cremated. The transgression cannot, however, be viewed as an aberration in isolation. In fact it can be seen in terms of the paradigmatic ascetic-erotic dichotomy in Hindu mythology. The contrast between the two is not a conjunction of opposites, but the two are clearly related in symbiotic terms. The mythology of Shiva, for instance, entails both *pravrtti* (action or worldly involvement) and *nivvrtti* (quiescence or asceticism). Even Naranappa invokes the classical example of Sage Viswamitra and the celestial nymph Menaka.

The third part of the novel is essentially about Praneshacharya's journey. He is caught between two worlds and his journey is a quest for a new identity, a new consciousness. He meets Putta, a half caste who introduces him to the material world, the world of the body- the fair, the chariot festival at Melige, the food stalls, the cockfights, the lepers etc. Torn between his need to confess his transgression, and to cling onto his priestly reputation, he is unable to arrive at a decision. The novel ends on a note of ambiguity in the fashion of the modernist narrative mode. There is no resolution, and no neat closure to the novel.

The plot is structured around a simple strategy – a question is raised, which gradually turns intractable, and while a possible solution is explored, the question itself does not remain central to the novel but gives rise to several existential issues which are more profound and metaphysical in nature defying resolution. While the initial question in the novel is about performing the last rites for Naranappa, the issue later shifts to Praneshacharya's inner conflicts that arise because of his transgression of the codes of his brahminical order.

We can observe an interesting dialectic of human qualities here. The majority of the members belonging to the brahmin community, with the exception of Praneshacharya, are unreflective and are selfish, dishonest and corrupt. The dead man, on the other hand, was, while he was alive, a reckless and boisterous brahmin, consorting with Muslims, prostitutes and low-caste men and women, and thus he had been a challenge to his community and its leader. Indeed, there is a long drawn-out contest between the agrahara brahmins and their orthodox ways on the one hand, and Naranappa with his subversive ways on the other. Not only did Naranappa personally challenge the brahmins through his apparently deviant lifestyle but he also successfully lured some of the Acharya's disciples into his own fold. And now, in his death, he has become the source of defiance to the point of plunging the community into crisis. 'Through this crisis, Praneshacharya seems to be moving away from an unreflective relation to his tradition and all its stultifying implications for his society to a greater critical self-consciousness about himself and the way he must think and conduct his life.'[13]

The act of transgression becomes the high point in the narrative dynamics of the text itself, and despite the Acharya's personal anguish, is on the whole seen in the novel in positive, life affirming terms. The act is allegorically very significant because of the space it occurs in - the forest – an area of naturalness, possibly even wilderness, outside the well ordered social space. The forest can have an ambiguous connotation. While it is a site of spontaneity and natural growth of feelings, it is also a dark and mysterious place. In *Samskara* nature is a silent but willing participant in the union between Praneshacharya and Chandri. The act is seen to have been consecrated in a spirit of the celebration of Nature:

> Below were green grass smells, wet earth, the wild *vishunukranti*, with its sky- blue flowers and the country sarasaparilla, and the smell of a woman's body- sweat.... In the forest, in the silence, the dark was full of secret whispers. Chirping sounds, from a bush that suddenly appeared outlined like a chariot, a formation of twinkling lightning-bugs. He gazed, he listened, till his eyes were filled with the sights, his ears with the sounds all around him (67).

Praneshacharya's senses become more acute as the smells of grass and wet earth hit his nostrils and the stars became as sharply visible as to a child's eye. After making love

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to Chandri he feels as if he has lapsed into his childhood. The description of this semi-conscious state of their mutual surrender is remarkable, as simultaneously, a child becomes a man with his loss of innocence, and a mistress becomes a mother:

> The Acharya's hunger, so far unconscious, suddenly rages, and he cried out like a child in distress, 'Amma!' Chandri leaned against her breasts, took the plantains out of her lap, peeled them and fed them to him. Then she took off her sari, spread it on the ground, and lay on it hugging Praneshacharya close to her, weeping, flowing in helpless tears (63-64).

There is an ironic contrast between the prematurely old Praneshacharya, burdened with the wisdom of all the scriptures in his head and the responsibility of the moribund agrahara on his shoulders, and the child freshly awakened within, responding to creation. The place of this rebirth is outside the arena of stasis, the agrahara, where time is at a standstill and the smell of wet earth and grass in the forest are allegorically juxtaposed.

As Praneshacharya re-awakens he no longer remains a detached spectator and his initiation into the sexual act begins to urge him to experience something that he had so far only read about in the classics, 'now he wanted for himself a share of all that' (74). He experiences a fulfilment of what he had been denied so far with his invalid wife threatening to become his destiny to forego the pleasures of the flesh. But Chandri defeats that destiny to awaken him to a life that he had not known of. She makes him conscious of his repressed desires and in the process she gives him an insight he couldn't have possibly got on his own. He also suspects that Naranappa had a fuller life; perhaps he knew that all along, but what he has just begun to know, that breaking social taboos and challenging communal orthodoxies does not really violate nature, and that perhaps fear is often a culture's tool of oppression. Praneshacharya even seems to understand for the very first time the full impact of the life of the texts he teaches and expounds. He can even rationalize his union with Chandri by referring it to the chance encounters between sages and Apsaras to the classical age to which normal social restrictions do not apply. In a way, these lend textual sanction and authority to his own behaviour since his immediate references, the Dharmashstras, failed to provide him any guidance in the matter. One can clearly notice in the text of the novel that the act of sexual union outside the socially sanctioned space is not couched in negative terms. Instead it comes through as a positive and regenerative possibility and provides a definitive direction to the overall design of the novel. After the act Praneshacharya's perceptions get so intensified that not only does he recognise beauty but he also begins to be sensitive to its absence: 'For the first time his eyes were beginning to see the beautiful and the ugly' (76). He begins to look at his wife differently: 'He noticed her sunken breasts, her bulbous nose, her short narrow braid, and they disgusted him' (76).

It is interesting that Chandri, who initiates the Acharya in his act of transgression is a marginalised figure, is positioned outside the space of stratified society. She is a prostitute, and as she belongs to a lower caste, she is not really a part of the brahmin agrahara though she is allowed to maintain a degree of visibility in the village. Yet she stands for the forces of renewal in a twofold way first, as someone related to the heavenly nymphs and transcending human social categories, and, secondly, as a representative of her very caste or social rank she is an epitome of nature. Chandri's body is described in terms of all natural elements like the earth and the river, and like the river Tunga she cannot be defiled or polluted. There is an aura of wholeness, an unconscious self-sufficiency about her, she was 'a natural in pleasure, unaccustomed to self reproach' (68). Moreover, like the *devadasis*, the former temple-dancers, Chandri is a *nityasumangali*, i.e., a perennially auspicious woman. By virtue of her profession she is both outside the structured society as well as is recognized by it. Like the river Tunga she is in the village but unshackled by it. This is how she expresses her kinship to the eternally cleansing flow of river:

> If Naranappa's body didn't get the proper rituals, he could become a tormenting ghost. She had enjoyed life with him for ten years. How could she rest till he got a proper funeral? Her heart revolted. It's true, Naranappa had given up **brahminhood. Ate with** Muslims. She too did. But no sin will ever rub off on her. Born to a family of prostitutes, she was an exception to all rules. She was ever-auspicious, daily-wedded, the one without widowhood. How can sin defile a running river? It's good for a drink when a man's thirsty, it's good for a wash when a man's filthy, and it's good for bathing the god's images with; it says Yes to everything, never a No. Like her. Doesn't dry up, doesn't tire. Tunga, river that doesn't dry, doesn't tire (p. 44).

In the juxtaposition of Praneshacharya and Chandri as the confrontation of a brahmin and a shudra, the novel also reflects the political and social ideology of the author. Murthy admits that the ideas of Marx, Gandhi and Lohia had influenced his writings. In a way the brahmin hero represents the modern intellectual and Chandri, who comes from a lower social background challenges the existing order to call for an upheaval for social change.

The representation of all the lower caste women in the novel is marked by a sensuousness that is absent in the brahmin women, who are depicted as frigid, withered with dwarfish braids. Hair is a central motif in the

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description of female sexuality. In direct opposition to the dwarfish tight braids of the brahmin women is the lustrous hair associated with Chandri, Belli and Padmavati. The snake imagery in the novel lends itself by extension to this sexual connotation of Padmavati's 'snake braid coming down her shoulder, over her breast'(123) and Chandri's 'black snake like hair coiled in a knot' (15). The unbraided hair of Belli as she emerges from the river –'wearing only a piece below her waist, naked above, waves of hair pouring **over back and** face' (40), is another manifestation of her potent sexuality as also reflected by her body, 'the colour of earth, fertile, ready for seed, warmed by an early sun' (37). Chandri's adornment of her body with flowers is also celebration of this natural acceptance of passion. It is the only house in the village, which has the night-queen bush flowering, 'invading the night like some raging lust, pouring forth its nocturnal fragrance. The agrahara writhed in its hold as in the grip of a magic serpent-binding spell' (15). Indeed, Chandri is the counterpart of the brahmin women of the agrahara who are described as desiccated and rather ugly, in any case deficient, and, on the other hand, a complement to the brahmin male Praneshacharya. Whereas the latter embodies the order and strength of an orthodox culture turned sterile, Chandri stands for life, sensuality, nature and earthiness.

The sterility of the agrahara symbolized by absence of excitement at any births or marriages (not recorded in the narrative) is set against the exuberance of nature, the rising tide in the river Tunga that flows directly behind it. Nature is seen to oppose any form of denial. It cannot be curbed, repressed, or restricted with even man-imposed barriers like the damning of the river Tunga at Kaimara, for in the rainy months, the river waters would threaten the agrahara out of its complacency. The constantly flowing water thus negated the stasis that had set in at Durvasapura.

Despite Praneshacharya's obvious denial of all pleasures, specifically those that were carnal in nature, there is a constant undertone of sexuality in the text. The polarity between restraint and abandonment, asceticism and eroticism, the intellectual and the sensual, the denial and the celebration, brings into focus the allegorical nature of the novel. Naranappa's world of celebration is a Dionysian world, the world of a Lokayatika, as he is a hedonist who holds sensory experience as the ultimate source of knowledge. In contrast, Praneshachara's is a neat and ordered Apollonian world which of course gets unsettled after his act in the forest. The Acharya's self-willed negation of his physical desires that had manifested itself in the pride within can be seen as a 'tragic flaw' in his character. He came to be perceived as a larger than life epic hero whose pride in self-denial was his greatest virtue. 'The Lord definitely means to test him on his way to salvation, that's why He's given him a brahmin birth this time...He proudly swells a little at his lot' (2).

However, one might question if in his self-denial Praneshacharya was indeed fulfilling his *ashram* dharma: he had consciously married a disabled woman in order to gain additional religious merit and to obtain salvation more quickly. From the perspective of the traditional social order of the *ashramas* with its four stages of life, he thereby passes over the second stage entirely: that of the householder. Physical love and procreation, the circle of death and birth from which he wishes to escape and which he avoids in the appropriate setting of a marriage, finally catch up with him at a place, in the forest, where he would have abandoned them forever and entered into the next stage of life. In a sexual union he experiences his own rebirth as an overcoming of death. Union turns into a kind of liberation. Under a tree, the classical locus of enlightenment, Chandri, a *shudra* woman releases him from the rigidity of his ritualised life and brings him 'back to the soil.' What is perceived as his transgressive act should indeed have been his duty as a householder in the village. In his supposed fall, therefore, lies his liberation as he opens out to himself and the world around him. He now can see everything in perspective. But the experience also liberates and empowers Chandri. One of the themes that strongly comes through in the novel is that the author contests the portrayal of the subaltern women only as passive victims lacking agency. Chandri, on the other hand, acquires an agency which reverses her perceived role. In the process, she, too, gets empowered. In a way her encounter with Paneshacharya is also a wish fulfilment for her as she recalls what her mother used to say, 'prostitutes should get pregnant by such holy menÖ. Such a man was the Acharya' (46).

At one point, Praneshacharya asks himself whether Naranappa might not even have been ahead of him on the path to salvation: he remembers a story in which 'an arch-sinner, an outcaste, reaches salvation and paradise by merely uttering the name Narayana with his dying breath' (48). Out of despair, Praneshacharya himself resorts to such an 'inverted' devotion himself: when, at the Maruti temple, his songs of love addressed to the god seemingly remain without impact and when the flower does not fall from the idol's head, he tries to move Maruti with songs accusing him of one hundred and one faults.

Praneshacharya had taken up as his life's mission the reform of Naranappa who proved to be a challenge to his own brahminism. But when he attributes the reason for his not supporting the demand for the

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excommunication of Naranappa to compassion, he reproaches himself saying, '..that's self-deception. That wasn't pure pity, it covered a terrible wilfulness. His wilfulness couldn't give in to Naranappa's' (47). Praneshacharya's hubris inevitably leads to a fall – yet his fall in this context also becomes ascension, to a fuller consciousness. His hubris led him to accrue larger spiritual returns. His penances became his earnings reckoned on the beads of his balsam bead rosary. He is aware that, 'If such compassion hadn't worked in him, how could he have tended an ailing wife through the years, uncomplaining, and never once falling for other women? No, no, only compassion had saved his humane brahmin skin' (48). But that perhaps was his self-image which undergoes metamorphosis after his experience with Chandri: 'I slept with Chandri. I felt disgust with my wife. I drank coffee in a common shop in a fair. I went to see a cock- fight. I lusted after Padmavati' (132). These thoughts, however, do not shock or disgust him, as they would if he still clung to his religious orthodoxy. He thinks these thoughts because they are his truth: 'Not a confession of wrongs done. Not a repentance for sins committed. Just plain truth. My truth. The truth of my inner life. Therefore this is my decision. Through my decision, here! I cut myself off' (132). He never indulges in any kind of self-recrimination, never considers himself irredeemably lost and fallen. And he knows that he has to carry the burden of responsibility:

> Even if I lost control, the responsibility to decide was still mine. Man's decision is valid only because its possible to lose control, not because it's easy. We shape ourselves through our choices, bring form and life to this thing we call our person. . . I chose to be something else and lived by it. But suddenly I turned at some turning, I'm not free till I realize that turning is also my act, I'm to answer for it. What happened at the turning?' (98)

For Praneshacharya, the committing of the 'transgressive act' can be seen as a 'samskara,' a kind of initiation rite that forces him to question the very concept of the religiosity associated with the entire brahminical tradition, unable to perceive and accommodate anything outside the grooves made by custom, into a new individual acutely aware of his social reality and capable of self- questioning. He also realises that forest, with its natural tranquillity, and the bewildering commercial activity of the market are not polar opposites but are connected at a deeper level.

Ramanujan interprets the transformation of the hero and the form of the novel in terms of a 'rite de passage' with the three stages 'separation, transition, re-incorporation,' the novel leading only up to the beginning of the third stage: 'So a *samskara* is not only the subject of the work but the form as well. The Acharya moves through the three stages – though we see him not entirely into the third stage, but only on its threshold.[14] The journey in the novel is born out of a need to escape and also at a metaphysical level, a need to come to terms with the inchoate stirrings of the individual self.

Plagued by the fear of being recognized when Praneshacharya travels incognito through the forest he undergoes transformation as his perspective shifts more and more to his inner life. In his adventure he is met by a half-caste, Putta, who joins him while he is wandering in the forest and attaches himself to him on his journey (157). Despite Praneshacharya's weariness and several attempts at shrugging him off on his journey, Putta is determined to stay on. 'Putta of the Maleras stuck to Praneshacharya like a sin of the past' (106). Praneshacharya gradually develops a paternal affection for Putta who turns out to be an amiable character.

If the fear of recognition had forced the Acharya away from human habitation he soon learns how difficult, if not impossible, it is to rid himself of his old identity while being confronted with the outside world, to which he exposes himself but which, simultaneously, overpowers him. He realises that, at times, it permits him no longer to be the honoured and respected scholar he used to be, but just some wandering brahmin. At the same time, he is scared of being identified. Therefore, self-discovery, for the Acharya, begins with the acknowledgement that he cannot really cope with the 'world.'

It is Putta who is responsible for introducing Praneshacharya to the world beyond caste and Brahiminism, the other world of material goods, violence and of sexual pleasure. In a way he completes the task that Chandri's act of compassion had begun. As Praneshacharya is inducted into a world beyond his privation, he realises that both worlds are parts of the same integral experience, 'one part of lust is tenderness, the other part a demoniac will.' When he comes out of the forest to encounter for the first time the world outside the agrahara to which Putta introduces him – the fair ground with its cockfight, noise and garish colours, the ruthless world of buying and selling that Padmavati inhabits, he finds himself slipping into the all too human world of little vices – telling lies, partaking of holy rituals in a polluted condition etc.

During an encounter at the temple his old identity catches up with him as he is recognized as the Great Pundit from Durvasapura He is mortified at having been found out. So he decides to escape by fleeing. Without knowing what he is going to do, the Acharya starts back towards his old agrahara on the evening of the fourth day.

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In the last part of the novel we see Praneshacharya, at a crossroads, his conflict unresolved. He no longer claims a true communion with God, 'Just as naturally as the body's desires reach out to me, not leaving me even when I think I have left them, why shouldn't God come and touch me, unwilled by me?' (82-83). He now realizes that in a ritualized existence what is often lost is man's simple relationship with God. His decision to go back to Durvasapura is an attempt at reconciling the irreconcilables. He can no longer go back to a stratified, codified existence. What is important to take from the character of Praneshacharya is that he made the decision to return on his own. In a way Naranappa's death led to Praneshacharya's return as a 'true' brahmin. Without Naranappa's death, things in the agrahara would have remained as they were. With his death, Praneshacharya is forced to introspect and question the concepts of dharma and caste. Naranappa was characterised as the 'anti-brahmin' throughout *Samskara* by the brahmins of the agrahara, but it was he who set into motion the questioning of dharma and caste for Praneshacharya allowing him to grow and return to the agrahara a better brahmin.

Three characters in different ways define Praneshacharya through opposition and polarities: Putta, Mahabala and, of course, Naranappa. Naranappa embodies all that Praneshcharya represses in his own person. He represents an unlived part of Praneshacharya's life, giving expression to those truths that Praneshachrya does not want to accept. Acting as his alter-ego he takes him to the threshold of passion and abandonment, ridiculing those very beliefs which were most sacred to Praneshacharya Eventually, he forces Praneshacharya into wondering about the alternative modes of quest. Salvation in the Hindu belief system is possible through two ways- by either worshipping God as a devotee or by being a heretic. In this sense Hinduism has two distinct faces: 'One indicates the rigours of social practice, of the rules of purity/pollution binary and the power hierarchies they sustain. The other face is liberation for it liberates the individual through its myths – here the great epics and legends which the Hindu considers as sacred rescue him from the severe codes.'[15] The way to go beyond the play of opposites, 'that's the way of liberation' (116).

Hence, Naranappa's arguments cannot be easily dismissed in the novel. The avarice, greed, lecherousness, and jealousy of the other brahmins expose their pretensions to piety. He mocks the contradictions in what Praneshacharya preaches by being completely consistent in his iconoclasm. Now Naranappa in death remains as much of a challenge to Praneshacharya, as in life.

Mahabala, the Smarta brahmin, a fellow disciple of Praneshacharya in his Kashi days, is another representation of this inverse attempt at attaining salvation. Praneshacharya had experienced a severe clash with the value system of Mahabala, who, after a rigorous study of scriptures, had suddenly become an apostate, was seeing a prostitute and was acting against all shastric injunctions. In reaction to his 'fall' Praneshacharya had taken to severe austerities. But now he finds himself treading a similar path in life.

Putta, on the other hand, symbolizes a being totally one with his world. He is not tormented by any profound dilemmas, he is accepting of his fate, is a riddle master, an expert bargainer, a procurer, a gambler and slips into all these roles with ease and enjoyment. He initiates Praneshacharya into the mysteries of the ordinary as well as the unfamiliar. In his un-self-conscuious condition he remains a polar opposite of the troubled priest beset by several moral anxieties.

All the three, Putta, Mahabala and Naranappa are thus instrumental in forcing Praneshacharya to question his professed beliefs at times making him participate in the violation of the socio-religious codes.

The novel began with a dilemma of performing the 'samskara' (last rites) for Naranappa but it becomes a 'samskara' (transformation) for Praneshacharya himself. The transformation leaves him anxious and expectant at the close of the novel. The inconclusive and open ending of the novel is another reminder that even though the content of the novel is customary, its form is modernist. A dilemma grounded in a culture and ethos that is traditionally Indian, gets fictionally represented in terms that are generated by a literary movement that is Western. The novel is open-ended. The author does not offer a solution – at least not on the level of the narrative or plot.

The novel as its translator notes in his Afterword, is 'a movement, not a closure' in any traditional sense of the term. We do not have an easy answer to the manifold questions; we end, instead, with a protagonist who is on the road, 'anxious, expectant.' There is a view that the Acharya has experienced 'the pain of transcending one mode of existence to go into another.' But transcending may be misleading, since the contradictions Praneshacharya finds between stability and flux and between tradition and modernity are the kinds of contradictions one either resolves or cannot. The novel ends with Praneshacharya still on the road because these contradictions are the ones you can only negotiate, resisting closures to keep open the margins to accommodate various contingencies. What perhaps redeems Praneshacharya is that although he cannot resolve his contradictions he becomes aware of them. The

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event which on the social level appears as the 'fall' of the hero is, on the psychological plane, a device which permits him to find his real 'self.'

To interpret Praneshacharya's journey in terms of the wheel of karma, one can recognise him moving from circumference (where he conceived action and ritual as distinct and hence looked for a solution in the holy Books for Naranappa's rites) to the still centre where action and ritual merge into a nebulous whole, where solutions are not longer easily available nor accessible, but had to be explored while taking personal responsibility The union in the forest becomes symbolic of the union of the two polar forces. Fortunately for Praneshacharya, he has got wiser with experience, developing a new awareness:

> He became aware, this life is a duplicity. Now he's really involved in the wheel of karma. To relieve this misery he must lose awareness again and embrace her, must wake up in that misery, for absolution, one must return to her. The wheel, the wheel of karma. This is the life of passion. Even if he had left desire, desire had not left him (78).

Praneshacharya, one ascertains, is singled out for this experience in order to achieve this heightened sense of understanding where he no longer accepts unquestioningly inviolate laws laid down ages ago. The open ending of the novel, however, leaves the final question unanswered, but then, keeping in mind the circumstances that provoke the questioning, the answer no longer remains crucial.

To read *Samskara* as a critique of orthodox Hinduism is to limit it severely for it is a novel that repudiates a decadent value system but more significantly redefines the process of a collective code giving way to individual choice. While in the beginning of the novel Praneshacharya is one of a homogenous community albeit standing taller than others, 'by the end of the novel he is a lonely man unsupported by the community or God, and has to chart out his own path.' [16]

Notes

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2. U. R. Anantha Murthy,,'Search for Identity: A View Point of a Kannada Writer,' in Sudhir Kakkar, ed., *Identity and Adulthood*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press,1979, p.107.
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4. Ibid., p.108.
5. V. S. Naipaul, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1976.
6. Erik H. Erikson in Sudhir Kakar, *Identity and Adulthood*, p.34.
7. S. Nagarajan, '*Samskara*,' *Indian Writing Today*, Vol.17, July-September 1971, pp. 122-23.
8. Sudhir Kakar, *Identity and Adulthood*, p.9.
9. Erikson in Sudhir Kakar, *Identity and Adulthood*, p.33.
10. See Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchius*, Paris: Gallimard, 1966, pp. 324-35.
11. Ramanujan, 'Afterword,' p.146.
12. U. R. Anantha Murthy, *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man*, tr. A. K. Ramanujan, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 67. All subsequent page numbers are referred to this edition. The novel was first published in Kannada in 1965.
13. Suresh Raval, 'Cultural Impasse in Anantha Murthy's *Samskara*,' in Kailash C. Baral, D. Venakat Rao and Sura P. Rath, eds., *U. R. Ananatha Murthy's Samskara: A Critical Reader*, New Delhi: Pencraft, 2009, p.118.
14. Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985, p.177.
15. Ibid., p.175.
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A Tri-Generational Odyssey: Ashapurna Devi's Trilogy: Reading *Pratham Pratisruti, Subarnalata* and *Bakulkatha*

SANJUKTA DASGUPTA

Ashapurna Devi (1909-1995) an extraordinarily prolific Bengali woman writer and interestingly a close contemporary of French feminist philosopher and writer Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) however needs an introduction outside India.

Born in colonial India in 1909, self-taught Ashapurna Devi went on to write one hundred and eighty nine novels and around a thousand short stories and also four hundred stories for children. Ashapurna never went to school but became literate by merely watching and imitating her elder brother practice reading and writing as his school exercises. But unlike many Bengali girls in those days Ashapurna had the privilege of having for her mother a literate middle class woman whose pastime was reading. Ashapurna too became a compulsive reader but mere reading did not satisfy her. She began her literary career by publishing her first poem in the Bangla children's journal *Shishusaathi* at the age of thirteen. The editor wrote to her encouraging the young teenager to write stories for the journal. Ashapurna readily agreed and thus began a literary career spanning almost seven significant decades of Bengali social culture. Ashapurna died on 13th July, 1995, having secured an undisputed position for herself as a pioneer of twentieth century Bengali women's writing. She received many awards and prizes in her lifetime including the Sahitya Akademi award and the Jnanpith award.

The site of her fiction has most often been a semi -rural or urban one. The urban site that recurred in her fictional representations has been specifically the city of Calcutta. One of the most interesting features for the social scientist and the historiographer about Ashapurna's texts is the representation of the changing Bengali social culture from colonial to postcolonial times. From this point of view of course it is her trilogy, *Pratham Pratisruti* (1964) *Subarnalata* (1966) and *Bakulkatha* (1973) that documents society and culture in Bengal. The authenticity of Ashapurna's fictional representations is beyond question for she is one woman writer of twentieth century Bengal who was not readily contaminated by English language and literature. As she never went to school and was therefore unacquainted with formal English education, looked upon by the Bengali as initiation into the charmed precincts of power and prestige, Ashapurna's Bengali is not interspersed with English loan words, a common weakness in many Bengali writers. The Bengali idiom that Ashapurna chose to express herself in was derived from the well-known and well-worn contours of the domestic space of the indigenous Bengali milieu. Dialogues of her characters belonging to various age groups incorporated the resonance of the region specific spoken rhythm redolent of a home spun idiom, a remarkable peculiarity of illiterate and semi literate Bengali women's speech of the colonial times. Naina Dey had observed, "standing at the crossroads of time, when the history of the world was fast changing, Ashapurna Devi concentrated essentially on the family, especially on the women in the family."[1]

Ashapurna's trilogy is often cited as resistance literature. So, in *Pratham Pratisruti,* Satyabati leaves her marital home of 30 years after the great betrayal by her husband Nabakumar and mother-in-law Elokeshi who surreptitiously marry off her daughter, nine-year old Subarnalata, by taking advantage of Satyabati's absence. Satyabati resolves to leave home permanently and settle in Varanasi, where her father had settled fotr quite sme time. In a distinct advancement in purpose from that of Ibsen's Nora (*Doll's House*) and Tagore's Mrinal (*Streer Patra- The Wife's Letter)* Ashapurna informs her readers that Satyabati plans to start a girls' school to fulfill her dreams of women's education, a project that would also simultaneously grant her financial independence. She says, "Why should I become a burden for my father? I will set up a school, this will grant me livelihood." Her

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sister in law exclaims, "You will run your own life by fending for yourself? You are leaving home and you dare to do this. I can only fall at your feet, you are such an example.[2]

In fact, Ashapurna critics somehow do not seem to notice the trilogy's repeated emphasis on women's education as the best way in which women can gain social and cultural identity and freedom. Tharu and Lalita remarked on the rather conservative stance of her short stories and novels in contrast to her trilogy, a reason that perhaps led to her being classed as a popular novelist and not worthy of critical acclaim. But Tharu and Lalita also noticed that not unlike Jane Austen Ashapurna chose to concentrate totally on the domestic; the inner space inhabited by women- "The setting of her well-crafted stories is the family; her principal characters women; her themes, most often their struggles-subterranean, indeed invisible, if one has not lived the life of a middle-class woman."[3]

The first two parts of the trilogy are set in colonial Bengal. In the second volume we find Subarnalata's experience of marriage was even more bitter than her mother Satyabati's. If her father Nabakumar was an irresolute person guided by his mother, almost the effeminate Bengali male of the mid and late nineteenth century, Prabodh was crude, callous and insensitive. Subarnalata had the urge not unlike her mother to be empowered through education. At middle age when she gets her monograph published in a rickety press run by a relative, the typographical errors in the publication become the topic of mockery and hilarity among her sons and husband. It is only her daughter Bakul who watches through a slit in the shut door of the terrace how her insulted and humiliated mother makes a bonfire of the 500 copies of her cherished publication along with every scrap of paper on which she wrote. Needless to add, the shattered Subarnalata falls ill soon after and dies and in the third part her daughter Bakul. under the pseudonym Anamika Devi becomes a recognized writer who fulfills her mother's and grandmother's dream of education as power but remains a rather pensive and less vibrant woman than the two women who inspired her to perform.

But one cannot forget how Bakul makes the promise to herself that she will realize her mother's frustrated dream of becoming a writer as the second part concludes, "Ma, My Ma your burnt, lost writing or those words that have remained unwritten, I'll discover them all, I'll write every lost word in a new form. I will inform the radiant world about the dumb and painful history of darkness."[4]

In the last part of the trilogy, *Bakulkatha* (Bakul's narrative) Anamika Devi the celebrated writer recalls the story of an aspirant woman writer named Sabita. She too like Subarnalata had burnt her published slim volume of her memoir as her husband was infuriated that she had sold her jewellery for getting the book published. He said a woman who could dare to do such a thing was capable of having an adulterous relationship, an extra-marital affair.[5]

If Ashapurna had written nothing else, the trilogy that tracks three generations of mothers and daughters would have made her reputation as a dominant voice in Indian literature. The repeated emphasis in her narratives about women, marriage and family as constituting the dynamics of the inner space and the new patriarchy however also raises the issue of economic class and caste. Western education and culture had not penetrated into the rural and urban middle-middle class households of Satybati and Subarnalata. Though marriage practices in colonial Bengal and their literary representations have been referred to in great detail by Rochona Majumdar in her book *Marriage and Modernity*, the inclusion of selective references to Ashapurna's fiction or reference to the life of Ashapurna, who is a significant text by herself could have been considered as Ashapurna wrote powerfully about colonial Bengal in her trilogy that can be read as a social document.

Ashapurna Devi's daughter Pushparenu Roy recently published her reminiscences about her mother in her book titled *Ashapurna Ma* (My mother Ashapurna) published in 2010. Among various memorable moments that Pushaparenu records is the fact that for her sons and daughter Ashapurna remained a gracious and gentle mother, she never made the children feel she had an independent life and mind. Moreover Pushaparenu recorded that after attending to all the domestic chores Ashapurna would devote herself to writing only at late night, when the other family members had fallen asleep – "when everyone at home had fallen asleep that was the time that mother wrote."[6]

II

In this connection but on a different note, I can't help but add an observation about a significant cross-cultural parallel, leading to reflections about the possibility and impossibility of the euphoria about global sisterhood and feminist internationalism. I refer back to the first paragraph of this essay, where I had stated that Ashapuna Devi and Simone de Beauvoir were close contemporaries. In 2009 we celebrated the centenary year of Ashapurna Devi (1909-1995) who was just a year younger than Simone de Beauvoir (1908- 1986). Ashapurna Devi died in 1995, nine years after Simone passed away. But despite similar support for cultural freedom and rejection of

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gender stereotyping, the two women writers from France and India, who consistently represented women's issues in their narratives, were absolutely poles apart in their lifestyle choices and educational qualifications. The Frenchwoman Simone De Beauvoir had taught philosophy at the Sorbonne University among her other professional engagements as a public intellectual, while Ashapurna Devi had not received any formal education and was self-taught. Simone de Beauvoir did not marry though her "open marriage" with Sartre is still regarded with awe by the world. Ashapurna had a traditional arranged marriage and played the role of a good wife and caring mother throughout her life. Ashapurna Devi may have known about the writer Simone de Beauvoir but it would be highly unlikely if Simone de Beauvoir had read Ashapurna's novels even in translation. Maybe Simone de Beauvoir had not even heard of her third world sister Ashapurna Devi, the creator of such inspirational iconic figures as Satyabati and Subarnalata, among others.

III

Therefore, we need to remind ourselves about the status of women writers in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An interesting study is the comparative career graph of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and his elder sister Swarnakumari Devi (1856-1932). Swarnakumari was older than Rabindranath by about four years. She was a very talented writer and wrote many poems, short stories, essays and twelve novels and some of these were even available in English translation in England between 1907-1914. In fact, Swarnakumari had herself translated her novel *Kahake* into English in December 1913 and it was published in London by T.Werner Laurie Ltd. A second edition was published in 1914, signifying the popularity of the book.

Swarnakumari had asked Tagore to help her in finding publishers for her translations. On January 28, 1914, Tagore had written to Swarnakumari, "Your book reached me at the railway station as I was leaving for America. You don't know how difficult it is to publish a book here. Of course self-funded publications are not a problem, but unless the publisher is sure of positive reader reception he would not want to invest in publication. I know that your endeavour to get your book published here will not meet with success. Moreover, the translation is not of a good standard- this means that it falls short of the high standards of the English language."[7]

But his rather harsh letter to Rothenstein about Swarnakumari's literary ambitions suggests that women writers even from the distinguished Tagore family were not regarded with much seriousness. However, the letter suggests sibling rivalry too and Tagore's lack of empathy towards his sister who had emerged as a writer of some reckoning, seems strange, for very soon he would be writing the path-breaking, women-centric short stories such as *Streer Patra* and *Aparachita* in the literary journal *Sabuj Patra*, Tagore wrote to Rothenstein, "she is one of those unfortunate beings who has more ambition than abilities but just enough talent to keep her mediocrity alive for a short period of time. Her weakness has been taken advantage of by some unscrupulous literary agents in London and she has had her stories translated and published. I have given her no encouragement but I have not been successful in making her see things in their proper light. It is likely that she may go to England and use my name and you may meet her and be mercyful (sic) to her and never let her harbor in her mind any illusion about her worth and her chance. I am afraid she will be a source of trouble to my friends who I hope will be candid to her for my sake and will not allow her to mistake ordinary politeness for encouragement."[8]

We need to isolate the following phrases:

I have given her no encouragement. . .

she is one of those unfortunate beings who has more ambition than abilities but just enough talent to keep her mediocrity alive for a short period of time.

I am afraid she will be a source of trouble to my friends who I hope will be candid to her for my sake and will not allow her to mistake ordinary politeness for encouragement." [9]

This was Tagore's viewpoint about his sister's writing. Is it an impersonal literary assessment? Is it sibling rivalry? Or is it a more generational and generic rejection of a woman who aspires to be an accredited writer known at home and in the world?

But what makes Ashapurna Tagore's daughter or even the daughter of Swarnakumari Devi? In her reminiscences Ashapurna had written that she and her sister after much effort in procuring all the tools for writing and posting a letter, wrote to Rabindranath Tagore asking him to write out their names at least on an envelope addressed to them. Tagore obliged. Ashapurna's mother admired the confidence of her daughters in writing to Tagore, when he was looked upon as an icon not just locally but internationally as well. Ashapurna's mother had said, "So, you could do it? I had only dreamt of writing to him."[10] Ashapurna's mother's statement of resignation encodes generational advancement, what her daughters had done, she had only dreamt of doing but could never muster up the confidence to translate a dream into reality.

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Beginning in the nineteenth century, women's slow but steady progress in search of themselves became an irreversible process, which was enabled through literacy, education and corresponding intellectual curiosity and social empowerment. If Ashapurna had asked Tagore in her letter whether she should aspire to become a litterateur could Tagore have responded to her as Robert Southey the poet laureate had done when Charlotte Bronte : "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation."[11]

Much later, in a memoir essay Ashapurna had referred to Tagore's view that since the roles of women are restricted to domestic chores such as food, clothing and other physical needs of family members women have not been able to participate in intellectual activities and interactions with the male members, and this lack Tagore described as one that expressed the cruelty and irreverence towards the female family members. Ashapurna had supported Tagore's views and had added that, "Women can easily become lovers (Preyashi) but they cannot become an iconic personality (Sreyashi)."[12] The English translation unfortunately cannot claim the witty impact of the alliteration of *Preyashi* and *Shreyashi,* but that is about the politics of translation and not relevant for this essay.

At fifteen Ashapurna Devi was married. In her reminiscences she records, "Within two years of the publication of my first pieces I got married and had to move out of the city of Calcutta which interrupted my writing. The reason of course being that marital home (*Sasur-bari*-Father in law's house in Bengali translation) was not a bed of roses. Moreover, it was more convoluted than the restrictive purdah process of the parental home. Absolutely behind the iron curtain. But what caused me the greatest inconvenience was the lack of books in the marital home located in a suburban area. I felt like a fish out of water."[13] Much later she looked back on her own writing and stated not unlike Jane Austen that she never ventured to narrate the lives of people whom she had not ever seen or heard of, "My writing is fertilized by people around me. Nature descriptions by authors who are nature lovers attract me, generate joy and surprise, but such descriptions are beyond my capabilities. Within my capabilities lie just people. Middle-class, domesticity with which I am intimately familiar. I have not ventured to reach out beyond the known territories. "[14]

When Tagore wrote that letter dismissing his sister's creative talents as fanciful in 1914, Ashapurna Devi was then about five years old. What were Ashapurna's disadvantages? Born in the middle-class family, she did not receive any formal education but became literate by sheer perseverance and curiosity. She made supreme efforts to learn from her elder brother's books and school lessons and when she was around nine, she published her first poem in a children's magazine, *Shishu saathi.* That was the beginning and the crucial turning-point. Ashapurna persisted in writing fiction and essays throughout her life. Married at fifteen, mother of three children, a home maker who diligently attended to all domestic chores, Ashapurna nevertheless created some timeless fictional narratives that could be categorized as resistance literature in the oeuvre of Indian women's writing.

However, it would be an error to state that all the writings of Ashapurna Devi prioritise women's resistance, protest and non-conformism. As a matter of fact, many of her novels and short stories are stereotypical, in which the roles of men and women follow the known traditional binaries of dominance and subordination. Ashapurna herself was very conscious that the trilogy was her *magnum opus.* Referring to the trilogy and the representation of the three women in three successive generations Ashapurna had stated, "The most distinctive contribution in my literary career has been the portrayal of the three daughters representing three generations."[15] Further when asked which of her books would she regard to be her very best, Ashapurna had stated, "In response, I can state supporting my readers' views that *Pratham Pratisruti* (First Promise) was my best creation. But since *Subarnalata* was written about a time that I had directly perceived I have a lot of weakness for this second part of the trilogy."[16] In the same memoir essay Ashapurna had referred to the last volume of the trilogy *Bakulkatha* in which she stated that the role of Bakul was that of an observer not a protagonist or heroine. Selective close reading of the three novels will bear out that Ashapurna Devi's trilogy can be included within the haloed shelves of timeless classics of twentieth century Bengali literature.

IV

Pratham Pratisruti (First Promise)

In his essays "The Nation and Its Women" and "Women and the Nation" Partha Chatterjee argued that during the colonial period the dichotomous tensions between the home and the world, the public and the private, the inner and outward were mutually exclusive. The inner space of the domestic that was also the space inhabited by women as daughters, wives and mothers was

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sacrosanct where the winds of change such as westernization, female education, women's health issues were all regarded as violation of traditional norms and blasphemy against religious rules and practices. From this fiercely guarded inner space of societal rules and culture, resistance literature emerged in the form of women's memoirs and diaries which were distinct from men's autobiographies according to Chatterjee. Chatterjee cites the memoirs of Rassundari Debi (1809-1900), Saradasundari Debi (1819-1907), Kailasbasini Debi (1830-95), Prasannamoyi Debi (1857-1939) and Binodini (1863-1941). Most of these narratives were instructional manuals for younger women aimed at fortifying them about negotiating with the norms, customs, social expectations and changing times that defined Bengali society and culture. So Partha Chatterjee commented, "The genre, in short, did not require the author to express her "self" or examine the development of her personality. It was not a telling of an exemplary life, not even of a life of any importance: to this day, it is useful to remember, there are fewer biographies of Bengali women writers written by others than there are autobiographies. The genre required the writer only to tell her readers, mainly women of a younger generation, how the everyday lives of women had changed."[17]

If the scope of the memoirs of the nineteenth century women writers was limited and restrictive in their span and imagination as a deserving daughter of that rich though limited past legacy, Ashapurna Devi stands alone due to the striking similarities between the writers of the memoirs and her own narratives. Ashapurna's trilogy spans the past, present and future as the texts situate themselves within the immediate past of the late nineteenth century and both colonial twentieth century and postcolonial twentieth century. If the women-authored memoirs as Chatterjee argued elided issues of the self and identity, the fictional narratives meticulously graphed the emotional history of women's evolution in Bengal. The severe marginalization and determined resistance are represented through the dominant voices of resistance as the three women protagonists, Satyabati, her daughter Subarnalata and Subarnalata's daughter Bakul etch their road maps. It is obvious that such road maps are not about highways, but lanes, by-lanes and paths strewn with rocks, boulders and barbed wires. So the journey of the three women as narrated by Ashapurna Devi is a path breaking journey conducted through three generations. As a matter of fact, the contribution of Ashapurna Devi in terms of documenting the historical time in her narratives and her incisive comments about the strangulating effect of customs and rituals that annihilate women's initiatives needs to be read with serious engagement not as gendered narratives alone but as narratives that represent the inner space of a nation. As we are aware, all social advancement can be possible only when the members of the inner space are included and enabled to reciprocate in their individual ways to the demands of the changing times. After all, women of India constitute approximately one half of the entire population and their empowerment or powerlessness resonates through decisions made at home or in the parliament.

It needs to be underscored at this juncture that though Ashapurna was born in 1909, that is precisely, a hundred years after Rassundari Debi who was born in 1809, we realize the stagnation in Hindu middle class society and culture as we discover to our surprise that both Rassundari and Ashapurna never received formal education, did not go to school, and were child-brides in extremely traditional marital homes. In both cases, the two women were self-taught in the sense that they learned to read and write by imitating, copying, replicating. But there the similarities end. Ashapurna Devi's mother was a literate woman and an eager reader of Bengali literature who encouraged her daughter to read and write. Ashapurna became a writer at the age of nine with her first published poem with a rather symbolic title (*Bairer Daak- Call of the Unknown*) that can be used as an anticipatory metaphor of her career graph. Denied formal education in school Ashapurna Devi's ideas, imagination, reading and writing circled around Bengali literature exclusively. She did have access to translations in Bengali of literature from other parts of the world, but overall she remained a monolingual reader and writer. The contamination or influence of non-local literatures, cultures and linguistic styles were absent or minimal in her writings. As a result Ashapurna's narratives capture not only the times and social customs of the times past and present but also the use of the Bengali language, the home-grown idioms, symbols, images, metaphors that were part of women's speech, and from a socio-linguistic point of view these convey and record the customs and culture of the domestic space that had not been invaded by Western education and its concomitant influences that had discernible effects on speech, social and lifestyle practices such as clothes, food, recreations, music among others. Though cultural colonization became internalized in the lives of the educated, cultured men, the same did not happen in the lives of middle class Hindu women though some of them may have been literate.

On the other hand, we must keep in view that Bengali women who were born in urban Brahmo and Christian families were more liberated in their lifestyles and were educated enough to pursue professions as did Kadambini

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Ganguly (1861-1923) and Chandramukhi Basu (1860-1944). While Kadambini was a practicing doctor despite being a mother of eight children, Chandramukhi was the first woman Principal of Bethune College. Both of them graduated from Calcutta University in 1883. Therefore the life story of Ashapurna Devi as text may not be completely representative as an overall reading of Bengali women's lives of her times but it can be representative of middle class Hindu Bengali women of her times. This is the crucial defining feature and in Ashapurna's own life some changes had been remarkable but the overall environment was stubbornly traditional. Her daughter Pushaparenu was married at an early age, did not receive college education while her sons were upwardly mobile professionals and her younger son's wife had a PhD degree in English and retired as a professor of English. Nupur Gupta taught at Jogamaya Devi college, an undergraduate college for women under Calcutta University. Moreover Nupur Gupta has translated Ashapurna Devi's fiction and has written often on her mother-in-law's life and career.

Pratham Pratisruti (First Promise) begins with the author Ashapurna distancing herself as the creator of the text. She reposes all the credit of the narrative to Bakul, the third generation representative of this tri-generational novel. As if to create a riddle regarding authenticity and documentation and the fictionalization of the factual, Ashapurna begins the novel with the following remark – I haven't written Satyabati's story. This story is taken from Bakul's diary. Bakul had said, "You can call this a story, you can also call it truth."[18] Later Ashapurna commented, "Bakul had never seen Satyabati, but she had seen Satyabati in her dreams and imagination, in her feeling of care and respect"[19]. (ibid 4). In other words, Ashapurna is referring to the feeling of empathy, (*sahhridaya)* which consolidates the sisterhood of women through centuries and cultures. Interestingly, Sumanta Banerjee situates the nineteenth century Bengali women in the socio-economic context, "Women of nineteenth century Bengal, like women in other regions, were not economically or socially a homogenous group, their life style and occupations, according to a contemporary observer, varied depending on whether they were "women of rich families", "women of the middle station" Or 'poor women." While woman of the "rich" and "middle station" stayed in seclusion in the andarmahals, the majority were working women. [20]

But the authorial voice-over is irrepressible, Ashapurna therefore observes as a preamble in the very first page of the narrative, "There has been a history of many years of struggle behind the numerous Bakuls and Paruls of Bengal of the present times. It was the history of the struggle of the mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers of the many Bakuls and Paruls. They were not many in number, they were one among many. They had gone ahead alone. They have advanced leaping over ponds and pools, by crushing stones and uprooting prickly bushes. As they cleared their own paths they may have been confused, perhaps sank on the path that they had cleared themselves. Then another followed: Taking up the work to continue with what the other had left behind. In this way the road was constructed. The Road on which Bakul and Parul and their peers are advancing."[21]

Satyabati is first introduced to readers as an eight year old sari-clad girl who was married the year before but had not been sent to her marital home as she was too young. Satyabati is presented as a tomboy of the area, she is the leader of all the young girls and boys who are around her age. Her zest and energy are considered as alarming traits by her grandmothers, mother and aunts but Satyabati remains unperturbed. Her pert repartees, candid queries about gender inequality, her sensitivity towards oppressed women who become objects of domestic violence sets her apart from most young girls of her time. Satyabati's sympathy for her cousin Jata's wife and her manner of retaliation is indeed remarkable.

In fact, the experience of domestic violence that Satyabati is exposed to by observing her cousin Jata's wife makes her understand the humiliation and abjectness of rural women of nineteenth century Bengal.. This becomes more apparent when Satyabati discovers with great astonishment Jata's wife's dread about taking medicines as her husband and mother in law would not approve , even though the medicines were free of charge and sent by Satyabati's father who was a renowned Ayurvedic doctor whom everyone respected. Not unlike Tom Sawyer Satyabati was the ring leader of the children in the locality. She composed a satiric verse about wife-beater Jata which the children chanted whenever Jata was sighted on the village lanes. Ashapurna was very conscious that after all the rhymester was a eight year old semi-literate girl, so the verse was crude, candid and hard-hitting-

"Jata dada, swollen legged
Like a foolish elephant
On the wife-beater dada's back
Let the frogs kick"[22]

Expectedly, Satyabati also learns that women make humiliating compromises with their lives just to survive and remain domestic slaves. So Satyabati watches Jata's wife pampering her husband and flirting with him with

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great indignation. When she tries to remind Jata's wife about the fact that he had kicked her so hard a few days back that she had almost died, Jata's wife reprimanded Satyabati instead. She told Satyabati that after all it was her husband who had beaten her up, why should Satya be bothered and why should she compose rhymes and persecute Jata, after all he hadn't done anything to Satya.

Another episode also struck Satyabati deeply, and this time it was her own father Ramkali Chattopadhyay who had made a gesture that was overtly commendable but had devastated his elder brother's son's wife. When Ramkali met the groom on his way to the bride's home he instantly understood that the groom was very ill and may die soon. He urged the groom's family members to return home. But the severe Hindu laws ruled that the bride intended for a wedding must be married at that designated auspicious hour or she would be doomed to remain unmarried throughout her life. Nothing could be more disastrous for a young woman than to be stigmatized as *lagnabrashta*, the woman who could not get married at the auspicious designated time period (lagna) of marriage.

Aware of this severe stricture on the young bride to be, as her would be husband had been detected with an imminent terminal illness, Ramkali magnanimously prevails on his married elder brother's son Rashbehari to marry Potli and save her from lifelong ostracism.

But in the process Ramkali forgets the agony that he subjects Rashbehari's wife Sarada to bear. When Sarada was married to Rashbehari she was twelve years old, now she is a mother and sixteen years old and she is forced to accept her husband's second marriage. Questions regarding monogamy, bigamy, the Hindu patriarchal system can be raised in this context. Multiple marriages and having several wives was not regarded as a social or legal offence in the mid- nineteenth century. In a deft art of juxtaposition Ashapurna brings together the misery of two young women, the young widow Sankari who had come back to the Chatterjee household after her husband's death, and Sarada who feels abandoned by her husband, now that he gets married a second time. There was a time when the world of these two young women revolved around very different orbits. But now Sankari could feel sympathy towards Sarada. When Satyabati asks Sankari why she looked so despondent, Sankari told her that she was ruminating about "death" (Maran). Satyabati then comments, "All women seem to react in the same way, "I'll die", "I am dying", "I wish I was dead."[23]

In all these sequences regarding the plight of young helpless woman as wives, mothers and widows and the domineering senior women of the family, mostly widows or mothers Ashapurna underscores women's total lack of agency and dependence on the approval of senior family members, senior male decision makers in rural Bengal. Satyabati boasts of her skills of reading and writing and talks about the women of the city of Calcutta who went to school and received formal education. When Satya's cousin cross-questions her that women were not expected to read and write Satyabati asks, "Wasn't the goddess of learning Saraswati herself a woman?"[24] Women's longing for knowledge, at least acquirement of basic literacy has been well described by Tanika Sarkar, "All varieties of women's writings unanimously identified and condemned two problem spots within the Hindu woman's existence-the pain of patrilocality and the longing for knowledge. Whatever the format and whatever the basic political stance towards patriarchy, women's writings at this time agreed on these points of criticism."[25]

Soon after, there was a message from Satyabati's marital home, urging her father Ramkali Chattopadhyay to send their daughter in law to her marital home. Ramkali felt Satybati needed to come of age to go to her marital home, but Satyabati persuaded her father to let her go. During a rather innocuous sequence, with Satyabati's mother in law Elokeshi braiding Satya's hair and the braiding failing to stay in place, Elokeshi feels her efforts to tie Satya's hair had gone to waste as Satyabati deliberately upset her efforts by shaking her head. So in great irritation Elokeshi strikes Satyabati on her back with her fist. At once, Satyabati freed herself from Elokeshi as she held her hair. She stood up and asked Elokeshi why she had hit her. Elokeshi taunted her saying that she needed to be beaten up with a firewood shaft, then she would learn the lesson of her life. Satyabati tells her mother in law, "Ok, hit me, let me see how much firewood you have". Elokeshi feels as if she has struck by lightning as her son also feels when he enters the courtyard suddenly to see his wife and mother facing each other, the wife staring straight into the eyes of the mother in law. Such a scene was unthinkable to which the young husband Nabakumar was now witness. Seeing her son, Elokeshi asks Nabakumar to beat up his wife, urging him to batter her face with the shoes on his feet. Nabakumar is too petrified to be able to even say a word. Then Elokeshi sets up a lament that her daughter in law has hit her and her son is unable to stand up to his wife and throw her out of the house.[26]

This sequence is indeed an unprecedented one in Bengali literature, where the young child-wife stands up to the middle-aged mother in law and her son remains silent instead of beating his wife to discipline her and thereby pleasing his mother, convincing her and the

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community about his manhood and roused virility. The second such *revolutionary* sequence was when Satyabati tells her husband that she wants to go and live in the city of Calcutta, Expectedly Nabakumar tries to dissuade her but Satyabati tells him, "I am telling you clearly, I'll go, I'll go, I'll go to Kolkata, I want to see if lightening strikes me for going to Kolkata just because I am a woman."[27] However, the authorial voice informs the reader that Satya's resolve does not yield results immediately. Instead time flows and Satyabati becomes the mother of two sons.

The third such path-breaking sequence in a Hindu Brahmin middle class rural Bengali family takes place when Satyabati asks the local schoolteacher to bring in a white male doctor from Kolkata to treat her husband Nabakumar. Nabakumar had taken ill and as Satyabati's father was unable to visit Baruipur at that time, Satyabati sold off her heavy gold necklace and entrusted the schoolteacher to escort the white doctor to her marital home. Needless, to say, this was another revolution that a rural woman had caused in a conservative village in rural Bengal.

The fourth sequence is of course Satyabati's initiative to move house to Kolkata. After many years of vacillation, Nabakumar does agree to take up a job in the city. On arrival, helped of course by Bhabatosh, the local schoolteacher, Satya realizes the freedom of running her home all by herself. She perceives the liberation of women in a nuclear family. However when she had planned the move to Kolkata Satya had little expectation about any benefit to her own self-"She can work in any way she chose to, no one would notice, no one could find fault, What a strange feeling! What supreme happiness! Satya had never battled for freedom thinking of such happiness. She had merely wanted to move to such a place, where there would be doctors for illness, good schools for her sons and good jobs for men,

For her own self what could be good, she hadn't ever tried to figure out. She just knew there was criticism and spite. Now she noticed there was much more. So this was the joy of freedom? Instead of a sword poised over one's head there was a radiant sky high above one's head?[28]

The fifth sequence is Nabakumar and his friend Netai's suspicion about Satyabati's disappearance in the afternoons. They learn about the meetings of the brahmo samaj from Satyabati who even visits the Brahmo leader Keshab Chandra Sen's house, the evening when Ramkrishna Paramhansa visits Sen's house. Satya also informs them that she goes every afternoon to a women's organization and teaches the women who assemble there how to read and write. This voluntary bid becomes institutionalized as Bhabatosh Master who had become Satyabati's mentor opens a school for women-"Sarbamangala Vidyapith". When her husband Nabakumar asks her how could she dare to teach when her own learning was so limited, Satyabati complacently remarked that her own knowledge would improve as she went on teaching. Satyabati's husband is astounded and declares that his wife now inhabits a sphere to which he has virtually no access. Earlier when Nabakumar had reprimanded her for wanting to learn English, Satyabati had remarked, "I just expressed the wish to learn English, I didn't say I wanted to wear a gown and eat in a hotel?[29] Also when Netai's wife Bhabini's younger sister becomes a victim of domestic violence, killed by both her husband and his mother, Satyabati writes to the police officer who comes over to conduct an enquiry. This episode makes family members think that Satyabati is de-feminized, "In her body of a woman there is actually a dangerous man."[30]

The sixth and final sequence that may be termed revolutionary is Satyabati's voluntary leaving of her marital home. This crucial decision of rejection of the primary space of security that patriarchy promises to women is unique on many levels. Satyabati's rejection and departure, referred to in first page of this essay is more path-breaking than that of Nora in *A Doll's House* and Mrinal in *The Wife's Letter (Streer Patra).* Satyabati feels shattered when she finds that taking advantage of her absence her mother in law in tacit collusion with her husband has married off her nine year old daughter Subarnalata. Nine year old Subarnalata was a school student but too young and helpless to protest against her grandmother's decision. Satyabati had earlier nurtured Sankari's daughter Suhash and inspired her to get educated and looked upon Suhash who had become a schoolteacher as her elder daughter. But she failed to protect her own daughter from her mother in law and husband. No situation in the politics of the family and the familial could be more ironic.

This great act of betrayal that destroys all her dreams of making Subarnalata a complete human being makes Satyabati understand that she will have to sever ties with the system that honours customs more than individuals. Satyabati decides to turn away from such a relentless conservative society that destroys women's identity. Nabakumar curses Satyabati for her decision, saying that because her rich father had left her some property she had become so conceited. Satyabati tells her husband that she had not even remembered she had indeed inherited some property. On being reminded about it she tells Nabakumar that with that money her sons Sadhan and Saral should set up a school in the name of their grandmother and name the school, *Bhuvaneshwari*

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Vidyalaya. As she leaves she tells Sadu that she will set up a school and earn her own living, reminding the reader that before the birth of Subarnalata she had taught elderly women for a while. At that time it was a voluntary activity, now she would opt for teaching as a profession that would sustain her life. Sadu just falls at Satyabati's feet saying that she could do achieve what other women have been terrified of even dreaming about. Ashapurna uses the ultimate symbol as the first part ends.

The cinematic description frame by frame as it were is indeed remarkable. Satyabati was leaving the village in a bullock cart. The entire village had come to plead with her to give up her resolution to leave. But Satyabati remained firm in her decision. The narrative mentions the turning wheels of the bullock cart and the restlessness of the bullock. But Satyabati would have to change to a horse carriage in order to reach a new life. The last line of this part of the trilogy uses an appropriate symbol of a definitive turning point in the road map of Satyabati- "Suddenly there was silence. The bullock cart stopped slowly at Hat-tala. The bullock-cart lane ended here."[31]

***Subarnalata* (1966)**

As in *Pratham Pratisurti* or the Journey of Satyabati, in the second part of the trilogy that sketches the journey of Satyabati's daughter Subarnalata and also uses the name of S*ubarnalata* as the title of the second part, the emphasis is once again on women's education. The trilogy registers Ashapurna's passionate conviction that the ordinary Hindu middle-class woman trapped in the double bind of gender and caste could only be liberated if education is made available to her.

When Subarnalata dies her daughter Bakul was seventeen years old. In the very second page of *Subarnalata* , Ashapurna makes a caustic abstract of Subarnalata's life since her marriage and till her death- "In that house Subarna had spent thirty years of her life, she bore eight children, wept, laughed, worked, rested, participated in all the aspects of family life, yet the torment of feeling encaged had made her writhe in agony all her life." [32]

This was probably what Betty Friedan had so famously expressed in that one-liner in her *Feminine Mystique – 'the problem without a name'* that inexplicably oppressed both global and local middle-class women. The second part of the trilogy commences with Subarna's excitement about having a hanging balcony to herself in the new house that was being constructed by her husband and his brothers. Initially, her husband Prabodh had mocked her and had remarked that it wasn't that Subarna wanted to watch the world from her south facing balcony, she was eager to be watched by other men. Fourteen year old Subarna however fell for the wiles of her husband, who told her that he was indeed including her much desired balcony in the construction of the house. However, on the day of house-warming when the entire family moved to the new house, Subarna ran up to the first floor in search of her balcony. Instead, she just came across more and more walls. She rushed towards the second floor and terrace, but that part hadn't been constructed due to lack of funds. Furious Subarna told Prabodh that she was taking an oath that are sons would build a house with a balcony for her to avenge the insult of their mother. But then the authorial voice intervenes, "But what about her previous oath? Hadn't she said that if the house didn't have a balcony she would not even stay there! Alas, wife of a Bengali household, oaths were meaningless for her."[33]

When Subarnalata recalled her days with her parents in Kolkata, the only lingering image in her mind was her mother waiting for her to get back from school, carrying a bag of books. She recalled how her mother Satyabati would keep on insisting that women must be educated, that was the key to their freedom.[34] When Satyabati's letter to Subarna, delivered after her death according to her wishes, reached Subarna, in that letter Satyabati had written the only cherished image of her beloved only daughter in her mind was that of her nine year old daughter going to school with a school bag full of books). Much later, Subarna paid a surprise visit to her uncle in law's home. She had learnt that her brother-in-law Jaganath had started a printing press. Subarna brought out her manuscript with great hesitation, but when Jaganath read a few pages he could not believe that Subarna herself had composed those poems, stories and essays. Subarna had to mostly steal time to write or else her husband and sons would make insinuations about bad cooking, and that Subarna was engaged in thesis writing.

But Subarna continued writing her memoirs or confession. In that scripted confession was embedded Subarna's freedom. Freedom from the prison of the exercise book to the radiant mainstream.[35] But as referred to in page one when the manuscript was printed as a book, the typographical errors were the only bits that her sons and husband noticed. Subarna found their mockery intolerable. As referred to in the first page of this essay, when Subarna's sons and husband doubled up with laughter at the errors in printing, Subarna suddenly advanced like a tigress and as she roared with rage she snatched her book from the grip of her eldest son and tore it into pieces. Then she went off to the terrace with all the 500 copies of her memoirs along with every scrap

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of paper on which she had written for many, many years, and burnt them all, till nothing of her writing remained. Every word that she had written turned to ashes. Only her daughter Bakul remained an eye witness to the destruction.

Soon after Subarna was taken seriously ill. The funeral rituals after her death were quite spectacular though her sons did worry about stickling to a "budget." But the one who did not accompany Subarnalata's body to the burning ghat was Bakul. She had seen another funeral pyre on the terrace. She would never know what exactly turned to ashes that afternoon. Bakul had searched through all her mother's personal belongings, in order to locate at least a scrap of her handwriting. Ashapurna comments, "That Subarnalata was literate, that impression Subarna had totally blotted out. Bakul sat down on that part of the terrace where Subarnalata had lit the funeral pyre."[36] When Bakul finds that even the manuscript given to the printing press was untraceable she makes a promise to herself that she will recover her mother's lost and burnt narrative and hold it up to the world. This resolution is the concluding sequence of the second part of Ashapurna's trilogy.

***Bakulkatha* (1974)**

In *Bakulkatha* the third and final part of the trilogy, Ashapurna creates a distance between Subarnalata's daughter Bakul and the narrator Anamika Devi, the successful awarded novelist, though they are one and the same person. The narratorial style separating the person as text and the author as creator of the text and the created text complicates the narration but conflates the intention of creating reader consciousness about the author, the created text and place, persons and situations that may have initially triggered authorial interest in creating the text.

The time period of this third part is Kolkata in post-colonial twentieth century. Unlike the earlier narratives about Satyabati and Subarnalata, the role of Bakul as Anamika Devi is that of an informed observer, a scribe sensitively recording the changing times and the changes in the value system. The narrative exudes a sort of regret and disappointment as the fast paced city life and the changes that have happened in the lives of women seem to be more frenetic rather than creating a sense of mature fulfillment. Anamika Devi as writer and recorder of her times therefore repeatedly asks herself and queries in her created texts as well whether the present really marks women's freedom and gender equality.

Though Bakulkatha harps on Anamika Devi's neutral mind, her capability of empathy, but despite all the liberation of her mind inspired by the modern inclusive spirit of Rabindranath Tagore, the very subtle but unmistakable conservatism of Anamika Devi (alias Ashapurna Devi) comes to the fore.

The third part of the trilogy also tells us that Anamika feels a sense of culture shock and moral outrage about young women who seem to have, according to Anamika lost the sense of tolerance, care and patience and the graciousness of surrendering self-interest for loved ones. The inability of husband and wife to live a shared life of peaceful interdependence mortifies Anamika. Therefore, repeatedly in the narrative there is a refrain of a lament that this emancipation for women was not what she had dreamt of. This again, perhaps was not what the resistance of Satyabati and Subarnalata had aimed at. The sense of romanticism and nostalgia for traditional values of Asian families in term of foregrounding women's roles as caregivers and nurturers as angels within the domestic space, is perhaps the sub-text of Anamika the narrator's disillusionment with the changing times and women's role playing.

The tug of war between the liberated mind of Anamika towards new ideas and her traditional response to lifestyle changes in the conduct of young men and women can be an interesting study. In fact, the most remarkable attribute of the narrative is that Anamika never quite writes a graphic tale of the life of Bakul, but offers to her readers brief but powerful vignettes of various situations, characters and episodes of the so-called modern age. Is this because Bakul alias Anamika though living with her brother's family remained unmarried all her life? Is the life of a single woman not as interesting as that of an adult married woman? Is the single woman just an observer of social values? Is the single woman's life one of social exclusion? Is the single woman not an active agent of social evolution but a social documentarian, just a passive chronicler of her times? These questions however are not addressed in the trilogy.

Did Ashapurna construe that the life of Bakul was somehow a bare one as she was outside the charmed circle of belonging within the patriarchal system of wifehood, motherhood and perhaps widowhood? These have been the three stages of women's lives that Ashapurna had represented with tremendous creative energy and incisive insight. As Anamika remains till the end of the narrative a single woman who had now grown old, narration of her own life was about abstract ruminations of the art of fiction, the role of the author in a created text and the record of the convolutions of time present enmeshed in time past , struggling towards the future. In a rather resigned mood of confusion if not despair Anamika as scribe of her contemporary times ruminates,

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"I am trying to grasp the moments but these are eluding me. These moments are not leaving behind anything permanent, these are like soap suds, like colorful bubbles that disappear into thin air...Modern? No, I won't call it modern, I'd rather ask how can I pen down the present society? I get to hear, that unbelievably, unknown dangerous animals have invaded homes, they have aligned themselves with the householders and those creatures are not even trying to hide their nails, teeth or horns. Instead they are describing these as objects of pride. But I've merely heard about these thingsÖ"[37]

So in several sharply defined vignettes Ashapurna through Anamika identifies several features that have rapidly changed the social fabric of the late twentieth century. These comprise the growing sense of intolerance, dissatisfaction and overly ambitious nature of women, as reflected in the life and suicide of charming Namita. Namita gained fame, money and power as a film star but she was lonely and insecure and was ultimately driven to committing suicide. The failure of the marriage of Shovan and Rekha due to their incompatibility was another case in point. Also, the recent exodus of children longing to reach distant shores in search of material comfort and fame, leaving their own kith and kin behind was also identified as a negative feature. Though their parents suffered, the children were motivated and in a performance-driven life, emotional attachments had to be compromised. Also Bakul/Anamika found it very difficult to accept the behaviorism of the youth of the present generation. The body hugging T shirts and trousers of the young men and hipster saris and brief blouses of the young women, their going off to picnics without any chaperone, listening to popular English songs all caused a sense of repulsion and violent culture shock in the mind of the daughter of Subarnalata. [38]

As a matter of fact, in *Bakulkatha* Ashapurna reiterates the rhetorical question as she describes the contemporary times and social behavior of the young generations- was this the sort of world for women, was this the sort of freedom that Satyabati and Subarnalata had desired and dreamt about? The only positive source of modern life of the young that has met with the approval of Anamika is that of of her niece Shampa marrying a working class young man Satyaban and both of them achieving their dreams through hard work and total dedication to each other through their playfulness and passionate care for each other. So despite the negative aspects, the third part of the trilogy ends on a positive note as it cites the shared happiness and gender equality in the life of Shampa and Satyaban. However, the refrain that lingers in the air as the trilogy ends are the queries that Ashapurna inserts into the minds and voices of the three generations of women that she represented, grandmother Satyabati, daughter Subarnalata and grand-daughter Bakul-

"Is this what we had wanted? You, I, our mother, grandmother, countless imprisoned women if this nation? Is this the manifestation of freedom? The freedom, for which the imprisoned women had beaten their heads against stone walls, had silently wailed and cursed their fate? Was this the light of freedom, the freedom for which women imprisoned within iron cells had prayed for, waited for? No Bakul- this is not what we had wanted."[39]

This authorial voice of reservation and disappointment that resonated through the third volume of the trilogy perhaps also indicates the difference between the middle class Hindu women that Ashapurna represented in her trilogy and the more liberated women in Rabindranath Tagore's narratives. Charulata (*Nastanir)* and Bimala (*Ghare Baire*) belong approximately to the same historical time as Subarnalata. But there are no discernible elements that can bring Charulata and Subarnalata together. Moreover, in Tagore's novel the macro issues of nationalism, colonialism, communal riots, religious discord between Hindus and Muslims play crucial roles in the fictional narratives. In Ashapurna's novels such issues are peripheral and do not inform the central discourse. As Partha Chatterjee had argued Ashapurna Devi's narratives fall within the nineteenth century format of narratives, that consolidates the binaries between the home and the world, the inner space of the domestic and the outer space that was the masculine domain. But the trilogy is not a saga of defeatism, moral outrage and resignation. Each of the three parts end on a positive note of triumph marking social progress despite the fact that the last part expresses the author's reservations and censure about the manner and mode of the exhibition of freedom. Was Ashapurna's youthful mind slowing down or was it that the overlap between the home and the world which had become inevitable with more and more working women taking decisions about all aspects of their lives seemed to her to be in excess of what had been her target regarding women's liberation? She had herself admitted in her memoir piece that she was now confined to her home, her mobility had slowed down due to age and so she felt she was unable to keep pace with the rapidly changing times, about which however she made no bones about expressing her disapproval.[40]

But then Ashapurna had written in her non-fictional text that she had invariably written about women warriors and rebels, she had never been attracted to recording the lives of complacent average women who were compliant and complicit in the process of exploitation and marginalization of women. Therefore,

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Ashapurna Devi wrote, "Whatever I have written has been within the middle class society that I had directly observedÖI haven't written about politics, I haven't quite written about social-activists. I have written about women within the middle-class households. But I have written about those who have not been able to accept the intolerable situations within the homes. If the situation demands- then they give up home or their husbands. All along within my mind there was an element of uncompromising rebellion, but that was never apparent. You may even call it the desire for women's liberation. But that urge was not a personal one. It was directed towards the progress of society and the community as such." [41]

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History as Textual Practice: Reading Contemporary Malayalam Fiction

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Two fictional works from the period after the end of modernism in Malayalam are chosen for critical analysis here: N. S. Madhavan's novel, *Lanthan Batheriyile Luthiniyakal* (Litanies of Dutch Battery, 2003) and a short story by Sara Joseph, "Prakasiniyude Makkal" (The Children of Prakasini, 1989). References are also made to O.V. Vijayan's *Madhuram Gayati* (Sweet Is the Music, 1990), a novel that seeks to raise issues that are somewhat unusual in the fictional terrain of Malayalam.[1] Between them these three works are expected to provide a context to discuss questions that are of central relevance to the fictional situation in present day Malayalam.

N.S. Madhavan is known to Malayali readers as a writer who has given a new twist to the tradition of fiction writing by blending a deep sense of the craft of fiction with an awareness of the complexities of life and history. Right from his earliest short story "Shishu" that was widely acclaimed after its initial publication in the *Mathrubhumi* weekly in 1970, his claim to recognition has been as an artist for whom art has meant, simultaneously, life, language and history. *Choolaimedile Shavangal* (The Corpses of Choolaimedu, 1981) that contained some of his stories written in the early seventies provided indications of a writer who in the modernist days was not willing to buy the usual arguments proffered by modernism on the nature of the relation between art and ideology. Is art an expression of ideology or is it an expulsion of ideology? Caught apparently on the horns of this dilemma, the artist in Madhavan must have been seeking a solution to this problem, as was indicated by the creative silence that he adopted for the most part of the eighties. His subsequent writings, including the stories collected in *Higwitta* (1993), *Thiruthu* (1996), *Paryayakathakal* (2000) and *Arthanareekandam* (2003) throw light on the new ways that Madhavan devised in this period to invest modernism with a sense of the social that was perceived to be conspicuously absent in the "official" specimens of the trend. *Litanies of Dutch Battery*, the first novel to emerge from the genius of this accomplished storyteller, is another pointer to this.

Litanies of Dutch Battery indeed shows that Madhavan's competence as a storyteller is not limited to short narratives alone, but embraces longer forms of writing as well. One might wonder for a moment whether the formal distinction between the short story and the novel is all that vital for a writer like Madhavan whose shorter fiction embodies themes that are of larger significance. It is not as though this writer prefers the broader canvas of the novel to tell stories that extend across historical times. Many of his short stories too cover a relatively longer time span. In this he seems to take a route different from what a predecessor like O.V. Vijayan–who seems apparently to have exerted tremendous influence on Madhavan in his early stories–took. Vijayan's short stories are classic examples in Malayalam of fiction that follows the conventional norms of the short story genre. A short story like Vijayan's "Kadaltheerathu" (translated as "After the Hanging" by the author) is a typical example of fiction that recounts a significant experience in the life of an individual in the space of a few pages. It narrates the plight of an aged father living in a village who makes a long journey to the prison in the city to see his son who has been sentenced to death. The helpless Vellayi-appan in this story meets his son Kundunni in the jail and talks to him in monosyllables, and waits to receive the dead body of his son the following day. The narration here is compressed, and the writer's conscious effort is to make the story visually appealing, so to say, by providing graphic images of the events depicted. Madhavan is aware of the absurdity of the critical practice of placing a premium on such compressed narrations. Can one compress significant human experience into a narrative

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of ten thousand words, he wonders aloud in the preface to the second edition of *Choolaimedile Shavangal*.[2] Vijayan's stories emerge from the modernist problematic, while what would suit the post-modern scenario as unfolded in Madhavan is a story that fits the time frame of a television episode. Madhavan of course does not mention Vijayan, but his characterization of the short story form as literature's revenge on the visual media could be read as an implicit comment on the practice of looking at literary genres – and literary experiences as well – non-historically.

History in a sense is the matrix that shapes the formal practice of *Litanies of Dutch Battery*. It is also the most important theme of the novel. The events recounted in the novel span a period of about fifteen years in the life of the adolescent narrator, Edwina Theresa Irene Maria Anne Margarita Jessica, born in Lanthan Bathey (Dutch Battery), one of the many islands off the coast of the Ernakulam mainland, the deltas dotting the waters of Kochi. Jessica is heir not only to the family name, "Kanakkukattathil" (meaning "pilferers of calculations"), suggesting her lineage from forefathers who stole the calculus of ship building from their Dutch masters, but to the myths, legends and histories encircling the lives of fellow islanders. The legend concerning her great grandfather's pilferage, as far as Jessica is concerned, is the story of the genesis of her family, leading up to her own story that starts from her birth on 24 April 1951. At one level *Litanies of Dutch Battery* narrates the story of Jessica's growing up as the member of a small community with its own social and cultural ethos in the small water-logged island of Lanthan Bathery. The inhabitants of Lanthan Bathery and the neighbouring delta of Ponjikkara are mostly fisher folk whose ancestors – converts to Christianity from depressed classes – had run away from the mainland a few centuries earlier in order to protect their faith from Dutch Protestants who had taken control of the land of Kochi in the seventeenth century. *Litanies of Dutch Battery* narrates the tale of fiction-loving Jessica's real and imagined life in the island environs of Lanthan Bathery where it merges with the history of Kerala and of India in the turbulent period following the country's independence.

One would certainly be inclined to appreciate *Litanies of Dutch Battery* as a well-crafted artifact that invents a fictional space where a number of interesting events, situations and characters coalesce. The narrator, Jessica with her string of names that she got from her over-enthusiastic relatives and friends during baptism, her father Mathevoos the carpenter, her youthful mother Metilda who is conscious of the age difference between herself and her husband, her Aunt Victoria, her Uncle Edwin, the master cook and specialist in biriyani-making, who had once been in the service of Colonel Bristow, her cousin Johnson, her grandfather Markose, long believed to be dead in a shipwreck, but who makes a miraculous return to Lanthan Bathery midway through the story, her friends, Rosy, Daisy and Natasha and their father Gomez Chettan who becomes a communist in his later years, the group of youngsters in the island, Santiago, Francis, Michael and others obsessed with the *chavittunatakam* theatre and perpetually discussing the possibility of reenacting the Charlemagne play that they had seen enacted as children, the parish priest who is called Pilathosachan (Father Pilate) by the local people because of his habit of washing his hands every now and then, Comrades Raghavan and Ramachandra Shenoy working hard to create a foothold for the communist party among the members of a community perceived in general to be hostile to it and the mathematics teacher at the local school, Pushpangadan, perennially glued to his desk working out a solution to the last theorem of Fermat pertaining to prime numbers which he hopes to disprove– these characters and their antics, somewhat Marquezian in their structuring, form the hub of the fictional activities in the novel. Madhavan's inventive faculty, an extension of his fictional imagination, shows itself to be in full play in the parts of the novel where the plot follows the fictional thread tangled around these characters.

What makes *Litanies of Dutch Battery* artistically more relevant however is the fact that it also narrates a social experience and initiates a textual practice involving questions of subject, history and gender identity. This obviously is a matter that concerns some of the textual relations implied by the narrative. An interesting aspect of the text is its narrative transvestism whereby the male author promotes a female surrogate to act as the narrator. Not that this device is unprecedented in the tradition of novel writing. But here in this novel one might come across a conscious attempt at the creation of a fluid realm of subjective experience where the received notions of gender identity are severely questioned. The male reader is in for a mild shock, a sort of "gender trouble," to borrow Judith Butler's expression,[3] at a point in the novel where he discovers that the narrator he has been following through is indeed a female. Though it is Jessica's growing up in the first fifteen years of her life that forms the pivot of action in the novel, we see that this is intertwined with the narration of major political and social events in the constitution of India – and indeed of Kerala – as a modern nation in the period following Independence. In fact at the very opening of the novel is an event that in many ways can be construed to symbolize the nation's entry into the world of modernity – Jessica's birth happens on

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the day on which eighteen health workers are deputed to carry out inoculation on new born infants at Lanthan Bathery and other islands. The message transmitted is quite clear: Jessica is born into a modern state where the administration considers it its duty to take care of the physical and mental well being of its citizens.

The textual practice that *Litanies of Dutch Battery* initiates is based on the constant interplay that the text maintains between the fictional and the historical. There are several places where this interplay is explicitly stated in the novel. Two crucial passages in the novel, each inserted at separate locations in the text, can be cited for illustration. One of them, about the centrality of history for the fictional narrative, occurs early in the novel where the narrator talks about her unceasing urge for "made-up stories." As a child Jessica would pester her mother for fabricated stories. Where does her mother get all her stories from? The land of Lanthan Bathery is a virtual goldmine of stories. One need only dig a little into the loose upper soil to unearth seashells. Dig a little deeper and one would get at satin boxes from Venice that were once guarded by Negro slaves from Africa, faded pieces of muslin that came from China and the remains of steeples that once belonged to the churches of local Catholics destroyed by Dutch invaders. The narrator cannot say for certain whether these are elements of fiction or of history. This much she knows: "History was the most important commodity our delta imported. History grew dense on Lanthan Bathery since it could not break free of the island's confinement by water. Stories had to be invented to temper its pent-up intensity."[4]

What fiction does however is not merely to temper the intensity of history. Fiction indeed is history, and the narrator is aware of this. History appears in the form of a grave ethical question before her. There is a point in the novel where Jessica adamantly refuses to share the imaginary piece of bread that she holds out with the crow in the nursery rhyme. The class teacher who is used to the usual response of children to the mischievous act of the crow that flies away with the piece of bread at the end of the song is amazed by the unusual response of Jessica, for whom fiction is no laughing matter. She bursts out weeping at the end of the song. She weeps not because she has lost the bread, nor because she feels cheated. On the other hand, it is out of an anticipated fear of being thrown out of history that she weeps. Narrating this event that happened on her first day in school, she says: "Stories are my home. I can suddenly walk into a story and shut the door on the outside world. It was my amphibious life in and out of stories that made me cry on the day I joined school" (108).

The interface between the fictional and the historical then is at the centre of the textual practice of *Litanies of Dutch Battery*. That is why the episodes in the story of Jessica's growing up lie interspersed in the novel with events from the history of the nation. Some of the historical events that took place in the fifties and early sixties like the communist party going underground after it was banned in the years around Independence, the lifting of the party's ban a few years later, Tensing and Hillary climbing Mount Everest, Soviet Russia's launching of the space satellite Sputnik, the Soviet invasion of Hungary and the assassination of Imre Nagy, the communist party coming to power in Kerala, the "liberation" struggle launched by non-communists against the communist government, the dismissal of the government as a result of the anti-communist agitation, the split in the communist movement, unrest on the Indo-China and Indo-Pak borders and the death of Jawaharlal Nehru find a place in the novel's narrative structure. These are actual historical events that gain a new meaning in the context of the novel. Alternatively, these events are totally integrated into the body of the novel, so that one might also speak of them as embedded fictional events that structure the basic experience recounted in *Litanies of Dutch Battery*.

An interesting aspect of this embedded history is the large presence of non-dominant versions of history in Madhavan's novel. The workers of the Tata factory, the members of the *chavittunatakam* repertoire and the artists at the Kundan Music Club are all participants in this history. In fact parallel histories of the nation can be seen to evolve through developments narrated around these and other similar institutions. There is an attempt at reconstructing subjective histories of the people through representations of experience that appear in popular cinema and music. History is not merely the record of glorious experiences associated with elite cultures. One can reconstruct history through experiences that occur on the margins, the likes of which are represented in films such as "Jeevita Nauka," "Chemmeen" and "Bharya" and the popular hits of P. Bhaskaran and the film songs of K. L. Sahgal, all of which allowed people to define their experiences – and in the process redefine themselves – in radically new ways. The charismatic personality of the communist leader A. K. Gopalan (AKG for Keralites) who is represented as making communists of people through his sharp gaze, the theatrical interventions of the pro-communist Kerala Peoples Arts Club whose popular play *Ningalenne Communistakki* transformed the political scenario in Kerala in the fifties in favour of the communists, the rabid anti-communist rhetoric of Father Vadakkan and the *kathaprasangam* performances of Rajan

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during the days of the "liberation" struggle, all get their due in this history. The novel that closes on a note of uncertainty about the possibility of communication itself– symbolically represented by the narrator feigning insanity – almost turns into a sort of post-modern narrative extravaganza at certain points where the banal and the serious rub shoulders with each other.

The events fictionalized in *Litanies of Dutch Battery*, large and objectively historical in their reach and magnitude, might prompt one to place the novel in a horizon of narrative possibilities where Sara Joseph's "Prakasini's Children" with its focus on the subjective concerns of individuals would appear somewhat remote. True, one might look upon "Prakasini's Children" as a literary artifact, as a finished product that meets the formal requirements of a well-crafted story. A reading of the story undertaken along this line will of necessity have as its focus its neat beginning, its controlled middle and its disciplined end. The story's beginning with the discovery of unwed Prakasini's pregnancy, its middle that describes futile attempts by her parents to get the pregnancy aborted and its ending on the fantasy of Prakasini giving birth to her children on the lap of Mother Earth will all find their rightful places in such a reading. Some might be inclined to consider the story, on the basis of this reading, to be a perfect specimen of eco-feminist creativity that does not compromise on the formal virtues of the short story genre. One might even recall the description given early in the story, of Prakasini standing naked in the pond "like a statue sculpted out of black granite,"[5] and invoke it as a metonymic reference to the technical perfection realized in the work.

Much as one would like to laud the formal perfection of this fictional artifact, one would also like to treat "Prakasini's Children," as one did in the case of *Litanies of Dutch Battery*, as iconic of the desire to narrate a social experience and initiate in the process a textual practice involving questions of subject, history and gender identity. Sara Joseph's standing as a major feminist writer with such important contributions as the novels *Alahayude Penmakkal* (1999), *Othappu* (2005) and *Oorukaaval* (2008) has been duly recognized by the critical establishment in Malayalam. She is the first woman writer to develop a fictional style that merits recognition as a specimen of self-consciously feminist writing in the language. She belongs to the tradition of fiction writers starting from K. Saraswati Amma, Lalitambika Antarjanam, Rajalakshmi and Madhavikkutty whose short stories represent an interrogation of the patriarchal culture with which they all had uneasy relationships. But unlike some of her predecessors, she is also a writer who is deeply concerned about the ideology of literary form and its inter-connectedness with history and culture. This, needless to say, makes her concern for literature simultaneously aesthetic and non-aesthetic.

While an aesthetic concern for literature would be geared centrally to the specific character of the story as an artifact, a writer concerned with questions of history and culture would also take care to pay attention to this somewhat "non-aesthetic" event called story telling, a process which to be sure unfolds itself in an ideologically dense environment. Telling a story in this context is comparable to a folk ritual that in effect would unleash a pedagogy involving the reconstruction of the collective memory of a people. Walter Benjamin had formulated this idea several decades ago by suggesting, famously, that story telling, an activity close to the cultural practice of oral narration, leads also to the transmission of a moral message. "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to it."[6] This obviously is a communal exercise. In contrast to this is the generally individual-oriented tradition of novelistic narration – and this would include the tradition of short story writing as well – that endeavors to communicate isolated personal experiences. The textual practice mentioned earlier corresponds to Benjamin's story telling in that it brings into being a community of readers who would respond to the story not as one would to an inert literary text, but who would actively body forth a collective subject and a collective history in the process of reading the story.

There are plenty of instances in "Prakasini's Children" where the textual practice propels the evolution of such a subject and history. Look at the way Prakasini is discovered at the beginning of the story, her swollen belly inviting the shocked attention of her parents, as she moves to take a dip in the pond:

Amma saw the full figure of the girl, her body smeared with sunlight and turmeric. She shuddered to see the bulging buttocks that refused to be covered by the heavy flowing tresses. Muthassi gaped at the full rounded breasts, the widening dark blue circles around the nipples. The servants and domestic animals put fingers on their noses. Look at the belly rounded like a folk musician's drum pot, their eyes mocked. (105)

What is striking about this description of the female body is that, in spite of the presence of male onlookers in the passage, it is not the product of the usual erotic, male gaze. This is because there is no hideousness or monstrosity about this description of the girl, who comes through in the end as one at peace with herself and her surroundings. Conventional narratives often present women, even those placed in non-erotic situations,

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through bodily metaphors suggestive of the grotesque and the uncanny. The *yakshis* and the *rakshasis*, the mermaids and the harpies of past narratives persist as invisible, yet palpable, presences in several specimens of modern fiction. An important fallout of such representations is a deepening of the gender-divide in society, the proliferation of monstrous female bodies leading to a consolidation of the gender hierarchies that are already in place in the social psyche.

What the description of the female body in "Prakasini's Children" promotes in other words is a new subjectivity that does not replicate the historically constructed gender associations active in contemporary culture. Even the well-worn divide between nature and culture seems to dissolve and melt away in this narration. That is why the text presents Prakasini as one whose identity merges with the natural environment with perfect ease. Prakasini, the text reveals, opens her eyes like "a flower unfolding its petals" (105). She is "a nipped water lily" (106) as she comes away from the pond. Her eyes "shine like stars" (111) when she speaks to Muthassi. There is an air of placid naturalness even in the way she steps into the pond: "— knee-deep, waist-deep, breast-deep, neck-deep in water – her hands raised above her head, her face beaming" (105). Prakasini indeed is nature, but not, one might say, a non-historical nature that defines itself as the other of human history.

One might say that it is by constructing through her fiction a historically definable subjective identity for her reader that Sara Joseph discharges her onus as a socially committed writer. In an age and in a context where a woman's identity is often defined in private discourses and fantasies in terms of the body, this writer, in a distinctly creative move, liberates identity from the confines of the body and lets it merge with the vastness of nature. Identity cannot be reduced to any single aspect of the human experience; it is indeed unethical to conceive of a unified identity in the first place. The concept of a unified identity has always worked against the female, as several feminist scholars, especially those interested in integrating feminism with psychoanalysis, have pointed out.[7] 'Traditional' psychoanalysis itself has in a certain sense promoted the idea of the unified identity in relation to women by suggesting that it is the failure of identity that is revealed through the fissures in the unconscious. Prakasini in Sara Joseph's story does not reveal any fissure in her unconscious, nor does she represent any failure of identity. What she reveals on the other hand is the history of her subjective identity by integrating it with the identity of a historically defined nature.

A comparison with a story written by a canonized Malayalam male writer will throw light on what I mean by non-historical nature manifesting as the other of the human subjective will. The story in question is O.V. Vijayan's *Madhuram Gayati* (Sweet Is the Music), a short novel published at the same time as "Prakasini's Children."[8] Vijayan's lyrical novel stands apart from the rest of his fictional oeuvre because of its unique theme, which is comparable in certain respects with the theme of "Prakasini's Children." *Madhuram Gayati*, sometimes described as Vijayan's bold foray into eco-fiction, is an allegory of the natural and human spirits fighting for survival in today's machine world. The novel asserts that man can survive the holocaust of the machine culture only if he agrees to live as part of his natural environment, paying due regard to the grace of the elders, what Vijayan elsewhere designates "the guru spirit" within him. Vijayan has already prepared the ground for such an assertion in his earlier novels, starting from *Dharmapuranam* (The Saga of Dharmapuri, 1985), where nature's grace combines with the grace of the elders to give rise to the cleansing force of the guru. Siddhartha in that novel acts as a guru to the people, even as he adopts the trees, the leaves, the river waters and the wind as his own guru. *Madhuram Gayati* extends this principle to human life in a more focused way and attempts to glimpse the cosmic unity that exists not only between the non-human world and the human world, but between the human world and the machine world as well. It was unwise of the organic community to have extricated itself from this unity and divided into the separate worlds of birds, bees, beasts, flowers and the humans. It was this division that finally led to the separation and consolidation of a crude and unethical "machinality."

O. V. Vijayan of course is one of the architects of the modernist sensibility in Malayalam. It was his *Khasakkinte Itihasam* (Legends of Khasak, 1969) that consolidated the spirit of fictional modernism in the language. Vijayan's work in general can certainly be invoked in analyzing the way in which fictional imagination triggers a sharing of historical experience through processes of textual practice.[9] However, *Madhuram Gayati* is unique in being constructed in the closed environment of a historical vacuum. It is not merely its closed formal structure that distances the novel from the dynamics of history. The novel steers clear of the dynamics also of story-telling and focuses instead on developing an allegory that can only recall a system of given values. Unlike in "Prakasini's Children" and *Litanies of Dutch Battery*, there is no room here for the creation of new values emerging from the textual practice. In narrating the story of the love relationship between an unnamed banyan tree and the forest maiden Sukanya, Vijayan's novel announces loudly

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that what validates the story is the philosophical system working behind the allegory. There is much conflict and action in the novel as Sukanya learns a lot from her guru lover about the past, the present and the future of the universe. Sukanya's parents and the banyan tree are born at this end of a period succeeding a prolonged spell of antediluvian nuclear winter. The earth itself is split into two with one half full of machines and the other half witnessing the disintegration of the organic world into a diversity of animal and plant species. Even machines are at war with each other and with the human world. Man foolishly pretends to be in control of the machines he has devised, but it is actually the machines that control man. The novel concludes on a positive note, when, at the end of all conflicts, things come together and the sweet harmonious music of the cosmos is heard once again.

Though both "Prakasini's Children" and *Madhuram Gayati* seem to be arguing for a harmonious co-existence of the natural and human worlds, there is a great deal of difference in the way in which the texts conceive of the relation between the two worlds. The natural in *Madhuram Gayati* is non-human and non-historical, the result of a split that occurred in the universe after the antediluvian days of cosmic innocence. Man's alienation from this innocence leads to his estrangement from the cosmic life force that lies dormant in the earth during the prolonged period of internecine wars between the diverse species constituting the organic community. This, to be sure, is no history. It is more of a denial of history. That is perhaps why Vijayan takes care to provide those details in the form of a *purana* prefixed to the novel. Sara Joseph, by contrast, is a perfect historian of her time and place. The capitalist mode of production and the functional requirements of patriarchy are no *purana* to her; they are part and parcel of a lived reality and history. That is why in the story in response to the lover's suggestion that Prakasini give birth to *his* son – heir to his endless wealth, his "rice fields, laboratories, ammunition stores and soldiers" – in his air-conditioned room, Prakasini asks quizzically, "How did you come by these air-conditioned rooms?" (110) Her lover had once been poor and that was probably when she fell in love with him. But now her love for him freezes when she hears him say, "Prakasini, we now have air-conditioned rooms. Why do we need hillsides, fields of grass, jungles?" (110)

Apart from the specific sense in which this statement relates itself to the context of "Prakasini's Children," the question why one needs hillsides, fields of grass and jungles indeed is one that global capitalism has of late been asking the subjects of third-world societies. In fact this is a question raised by *Litanies of Dutch Battery* too, if not directly, at least by implication. Malayalee readers might find this particularly significant, exposed as they are to regular debates on questions concerning capitalism's increasing invasion of Kerala's natural resources since the days at least of the controversial Silent Valley project. There is no overt reference in the texts of *Litanies of Dutch Battery* and "Prakasini's Children" to the environmentalist issue, or consumerism or patriarchy, even in the disguised form of a minor, subsidiary plot. Such concealed sub-plots, as the text of another of Sara Joseph's story puts it, "may not be to the liking of [most] readers" or, for that matter, of critics, who, especially, "may not take kindly to any relaxation in the prescribed norms relating to unity and tension appropriate to a good story."[10] In point of fact however, whether one likes it or not, such inter-textual intrusions do occur in the reading of any really effective novel or short story, turning the experience of reading literature into an ideological practice rather than a passive encounter with a given artifact. A whole inter-text of dreams, myths, culture and beliefs are invoked in infusing the text with life. The structures in the text merely act as pre-texts for such infusions. This is an instance of the way in which textual practice processes historical material to produce texts, histories and identities.

In turning the text into such an inter-text of culture and history, Sara Joseph and N. S. Madhavan are proclaiming not only their unconscious identification with collective experience and collective memory implied by the art of story telling, but a more conscious allegiance to the tradition of writing in the language. The act of writing here becomes a way of sustaining and conserving oneself as a social being. This represents a major leap in sensibility that the literary mind in Malayalam has taken over the past few decades. The leap is noticeable in all branches of Malayalam letters, but it has been more particularly visible in the evolution of fictional genres. Unlike several other fictionists of their generation, Madhavan and Sara Joseph do not consider theory to be a bane that is to be expelled from their system. Both seem to be greatly sensitive to and mindful of the debates on the fictional medium taking place in their language, and this sensitivity allows them some rare insights into the reality around them, which in turn prompt them to re-order their world anew each time they confront the world. This is a continual process, a process that is replicated in the textual practice that fiction inspires. Though the textual practice of fiction need not follow the logic of theory, a theoretical knowledge of literature's logic might allow for an easy passage from the world to the text. N. S. Madhavan and Sara Joseph know that this passage also involves a mad interchange of ideas mediated through the practice of a community's linguistic and discursive

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ingenuities. That there is indeed a method in this madness is what the analysis of *Litanies of Dutch Battery* and "Prakasini's Children" has indicated.

Notes

1. For English translations of the first two of these, see N.S. Madhavan, *Litanies of Dutch Battery*, trans. Rajesh Rajamohan (New Delhi: Penguin, 2010); Sara Joseph, "Prakasini's Children," trans. Ayyappa Paniker, *Katha Prize Stories 1, ed. R. Bhattacharya and G. Dharmarajan* (New Delhi: Katha, 1991), 104-111; O.V. Vijayan's novel *Madhuram Gayati* (Kottayam: Current Books, 1990) has not been translated into English.
2. N.S. Madhavan, *Choolaimedile Shavangal*, 2nd ed. (Kottayam: DC Books, 1994), p. 8.
3. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990). Butler's argument, incidentally, is that gender identities are more a matter of performance and cultural practice rather than an expression of prior reality.
4. N.S. Madhavan, *Litanies of Dutch Battery*, trans. Rajesh Rajamohan, 3. (Cited in footnote 1 above; subsequent references will be made in the text.)
5. Sara Joseph, "Prakasini's Children," trans. Ayyappa Paniker, *Katha Prize Stories 1*, 105. (Cited in footnote 1 above; further references will be made in the text.)
6. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana/Collins, 1973) 87.
7. Feminist scholars, especially such representatives of French feminism as Helen Cixous and Luce Irigaray as well as English feminists like Jacqueline Rose, have drawn pointed attention to this aspect of the constitution of the female subject. For an interesting discussion of the problem in relation to fiction, see Lidia Curti, *Female Stories, Female Bodies: Narrative, Identity and Representation* (London: Macmillan, 1998).
8. The Malayalam original of "Prakasini's Children" was published in 1989 in the *Mathrubhumi* weekly. *Madhuram Gayati* was serialized in *Kalakaumudi Weekly* during the same year, though it was published as a book a year later.
9. This has been discussed in detail in P.P. Raveendran, *O.V. Vijayan* (Makers of Indian Literature) (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2009), chapter 3. I have liberally drawn on this monograph in my analysis of *Madhuram Gayati* undertaken here.
10. Sara Joseph, "The Masculine Gender of Maiden," trans. P.P. Raveendran, *Haritham* 6 (1995): 45.

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The Novel as a Site of Cultural Memory: Gurdial Singh's *Parsa*

RANA NAYAR

Introduction

As I sit down to reflect on the range and quality of Gurdial Singh's fiction, Plato's famous dictum inevitably comes to my mind. In his *Republic,* Plato is believed to have stated that he looked upon a carpenter as a far better, a far more superior artist than the poet or the painter.[1] For Plato, the carpenter had come to embody the image of a complete artist or rather that of a total man. After all, wasn't he the one who imbued the formless with a sense of form and structure, infusing the rugged material reality with the untold creative possibilities?

By all counts, Gurdial Singh answers the Platonic description of a complete artist rather well. Born to a carpenter father, who insisted that his young son, too, should step into his shoes, Gurdial Singh chose to become instead a carpenter of words, a sculptor of human forms and a painter of life in all its myriad hues. On being refused funding by his parents for education beyond Matric, he decided to be his own mentor, slowly toiling his way up from a JBT teacher to a school lecturer, from there to a college lecturer and ultimately a professor at a Regional Centre of Punjabi University. His is a saga of courage, a profile in patience and gritty determination, which reads more like a work of fiction in progress. As one of the most illustrious exponents of the Punjabi language and culture, he has served its cause for well over four decades now. It was only once he had started reading the classics that a strong, irrepressible desire was born in him to emulate the masters. Having realised rather early on in life that the social milieu, locale and specific problems varied according to the cultural context, he worked hard to first discover and then hone his own distinctive literary voice. His own life, and personal convictions born of his experiences, motivated him to identify with the poor and the marginalized. It was this slice of life and its authenticity that got him his early success. In 1957, he published his first ever story called "Bhaganwale" in *Panj Darya*, a magazine edited then by Prof. Mohan Singh. Most of his stories were published in *Preetlarhi,* edited by the redoubtable Gurbaksh Singh. Though he kick started his literary career by writing a short story, initial success came to him as a novelist when he published his first major, path-breaking work *Marhi Da Deeva* in 1964. Translated into English as *The Last Flicker* (Sahitya Akademi, 1991), it was hailed as a modern classic soon after it appeared in print. However, his early success didn't either stand in way of or turn into a disincentive for his later, equally powerful and significant works of long fiction such as *Unhoye* (1966), *Kuwela* (1968), *Addh Chanini Raat* (1972), *Anhe Ghore Da Daan* (1976) and *Parsa* (1991).

Despite his immense success and popularity as a pioneering novelist in Punjabi, he continued to nurture his first love for short fiction. Small wonder, he has managed to produce as many as eight collections of short stories so far, the more notable among them being *Saggi Phul* (1962), *Kutta Te Aadmi* (1971), *Begana Pindh* (1985) and *Kareer Di Dhingri* (1991). Apart from nine novels, all of which have been widely read and acclaimed, he has authored some three plays, two prose works and no less than nine books for children. Besides, he has translated several of his own works into Hindi and those of the other reputed Indian and non-Indian writers into Punjabi. In addition to *Marhi Da Deeva*, three other novels of his viz., *Addh Chanini Raat (Night of the Half-Moon,* Macmillan, 1996), *Parsa* (NBT, 2000) and *Unhoye* (*The Survivors*, Katha, 2005) are also available in the English translations.

Gurdial Singh's Fiction in Perspective

Before we start making an assessment of Gurdial Singh's fiction, we need to put him as well as his work within the wider linguistic, historical and cultural frame to which he essentially belongs. Making a rather slow start, the

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novel, as we all know, began to emerge in the Punjabi language only in the later half of the 19th century, and initially it developed largely in the shadows of its European counterpart. Bhai Vir Singh, one of its early practitioners, who was known primarily for his historical romances, sought inspiration in the fictional works of Walter Scott and his ilk.[2] Under the reformist influence of the Singh Sabha Movement, his successor Nanak Singh sought to break away from the imitative efforts, rooting the novel in the very soil and substance of Punjab. Turning to the indigenous modes of story-telling such as *quissas,* popular in the medieval period, Nanak Singh gave to the Punjabi novel a distinct local character and habitation. It was through his efforts that the novel managed to reclaim not only its vital link with the oral tradition, but also with its soft, delicate formless texture. In his novels, fluidity of sentimentalism goes hand in hand with the ideology of a social reformer, something that Sohan Singh Seetal and Jaswant Singh Kanwal, who were to come later, also tried to emulate, fairly successfully.

Interestingly, it was in the Punjabi language that the *anchalik upanayas* (whose beginnings literary historians often trace back to when Phaneshwar Nath Renu's Hindi novel *Maila Anchal*) made its first appearance. Kartar Singh Duggal's *Andraan,* a novel written in the Pothoari dialect and steeped in the localism of the same region, its geography, economy, ecology, customs and conventions, was published as far back as 1948. In a way, emergence of this particular form of novel did help in foregrounding hard-core social realism in the Punjabi novel, which was to acquire its ideological underpinnings from a curious blend of Marxist thought and Gandhian socialism. Sant Singh Sekhon, Surinder Singh Narula, Amrita Pritam and Narinder Pal Singh, among several others, made a consistent and significant contribution towards this paradigm shift. By enabling the fiction to shed its obsessive, maudlin sentimentality, even quasi-romantic character, these luminaries slowly but surely paved the way for the advent of a truly modernist novel in Punjabi, with a psychological/sociological thrust entirely its own.

Until the times of Gurdial Singh, two diametrically opposite ideologies viz., a brand of naïve romanticism and an indigenous form of realism had continued to exert pressures and counter-pressures upon the content and/or form of the Punjabi novel. Apart from these ideological tensions, which helped shape the aesthetic concerns as well as their articulation, Punjabi fiction had continued to shift back and forth between the rural and the urban, the past and the present, the poetic and the realistic. The historical importance of Gurdial Singh's fiction lies in the fact that it sought to encapsulate the dialectics of tradition and modernity, even tried to attain a rare synthesis of the two, wherever possible, something that had eluded Punjabi fiction until then. Conscious of his role in re-constituting the novelistic discourse, he ruptured the tradition of Punjabi novel from within, while continuing to nurture it from without. By pulling it out of the morass of bourgeois morality into which Punjabi novel had largely sunk in its post-Independence phase, he opened up possibilities that would have otherwise remained unrealized.

Though not strictly a proponent of *anchalik upanayas*, Gurdial Singh could very well be seen as an exponent of the regional novel in the sense in which Thomas Hardy and R.K. Narayan essentially were. In novel after novel, he has assiduously re-created a fictional replica of an insulated, self-enclosed, provincial world of the Malwa region, where he has lived all his life and whose dreams and desires, folklore and culture he best understands and empathizes with. Most of his novels seek to capture the distinctive flavour of the regional dialect and its linguistic angularities. Malwa comes alive in his novels both as a place in history and as a cultural metaphor. Its stubborn, unyielding land, sandy soil and prickly air, low-roofed mud houses and vast open fields, mingle and overlap with stifling caste prejudices and intriguing questions of land ownership/possession to create a befitting backdrop to this incomparable saga of human courage, resilience and sacrifice. However, the self-limiting nature of the Malwa region doesn't in any way prevent Gurdial Singh from giving an artistically wholesome expression to the complexities of life he has set out to explore.2

Gurdial Singh radicalised the Punjabi novel or re-inscribed its ideological and/or aesthetic space by infusing into it a new consciousness about the underprivileged and the oppressed. Commenting upon his first ever novel *Marhi Da Deeva,* published in 1964, Namwar Singh, an eminent Hindi critic, is believed to have said: "When the novel was a dying art-form in Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was Tolstoy's *War and Peace* that had resurrected faith in novel as a form. In a similar fashion, when in the Indian languages, novel was going through its worst ever crisis, Gurdial Singh's *Marhi Da Deeva* revitalized this form as only he could."[3]

The significance of *Marhi Da Deeva* lies in the fact that for the first time ever in the history of Punjabi fiction, a social and economic outcast, leaping out of his shadowy terrain, made it to the centrestage of fictionscape. While seeking to project the sufferings and agonies of the hopelessly marginalized individuals as well as social classes/castes in a rather involved manner, Gurdial Singh has never lost sight of the imaginative/creative demands

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of his own vocation as a novelist. Often seen as a proponent of hard-core social realism, he is equally at ease with the poetic, symbolic mode of expression, even structuring of his fiction. His sternest critics also concede, unhesitatingly, that he did plough a fresh ground by turning novel into a trenchant critique of social discourse, without in any way compromising on its poeticity. Steeped in history without being explicitly historical, his fiction mediates its way through myriad, often disparate, crosscurrents of the mainstream and folk traditions of storytelling, latent in both orature and ecriture. Though he did radicalize the novel by infusing greater ideological strength and vitality into its content, at the formal level, he is neither an exhibitionist nor a maverick experimentalist.

Convinced that the form must ultimately follow the dictates of content, Gurdial Singh's favourite self-description, after Georg Lukacs' well-known phrase, is that of a 'critical realist.' Though there is an inherent organicity in all of his fictional work, he doesn't return to the treatment of the same subject or style, ever again. An inveterate progressive, he subscribes to the Darwinian notion of continuous, uninterrupted struggle with the environment/circumstances and also to the positivism of the evolutionary principle minus its ruthless competitiveness, as much as his characters often do.

Gurdial Singh's Fiction: A Brief Overview

In one of his novels, *Parsa*, a low-caste *siri*, Tindi, requests his benevolent master to tell him an 'interesting story.' On being asked as to what really makes for such a story, Tindi first hesitates and then shoots off a counter question: "Why are the stories always about kings and princes?"[4] More than a mere rhetorical question, it's the very raison d'Ítre of Gurdial Singh's counter-narratives. He is no less than a messiah of the marginalized, who has consistently and tirelessly tried to put the dispossessed, the dislocated and the de-privileged on the centre map of his fiction. From a poor, illiterate farmhand, a small-time worker or a peasant to an overburdened rickshaw-puller or a low-caste carpenter, it's always the primal rawness of human life that strikes a sympathetic chord in him. Conceived as victims of social/historical tyranny, most of his characters fight back even in face of imminent defeat. He strongly believes that man's ultimate *dharma* is to fight the tyranny and oppression built into his/her own situation. This is what often imbues his characters, even his novels with a definite sense of tragic inevitability. And this tragic sense is certainly much more pronounced in his early novels such as *Marhi Da Deeva* (1964) and *Kuwela* (1968) than it is in his later works. While Jagseer in *Marhi Da Deeva* falls an easy prey to the machinations of a beguiling feudal power play, Heera Dei in *Kuwela* stands firm, refusing to cringe before a taboo-ridden society much too easily.

However, the heroic or revolutionary potential of his characters began to come fully into play only with the creation of Bishna in *Unhoye* (1966) and Moddan in *Addh Chanini Raat* (1972). Unlike Jagseer, both Bishna and Moddan not only refuse steadfastly to become accomplices in the process of their own marginalization but also make untiring efforts to rise in revolt against this process. They even go so far as to interrogate the dehumanising social/legal practices working against them, but stop short of overturning them. It's their lack of self-awareness that ultimately makes 'failed revolutionaries' out of them.

With Parsa, a Jat-Brahmin, moving centre-stage, the dialectics turns inwards. His consciousness becomes the ultimate battleground. For it is here that the social tensions and conflicts wage their most fierce and intense battle. Parsa seeks to overcome the tyranny of caste and class not through exclusion or rejection, but assimilation and inclusion. In his person, all forms of contradictions find a happy resolution. It's in recognition of this fact that *Parsa* (1991) has widely been acclaimed as an important cultural text, a real triumph of Gurdial Singh's life-long commitment to the art of fiction. For any writer to make an attempt to reclaim the diverse and complex strands of his cultural memory within the scope of a single work of fiction, that too, with some measure of success, is, indeed, quite rare. And if such an example does exist in the contemporary Punjabi literature, it's Gurdial Singh's much-celebrated novel *Parsa.* There's both a touch of authenticity and self-absorption about Gurdial Singh's ability to fashion a wide range of human characters. But he doesn't ever allow his interest in or sympathy for his character(s) to either overwhelm or undermine his primary commitment to the social concerns. For him, man is essentially a social and historical being. As a natural corollary, his characters remain intermediate agents, individualised yet typical concretisations of the context in which they live and operate.

Almost all his novels, without an exception, are set amid the shifting contours of the Malwa region whose economic backwardness sometimes obscures its cultural richness. What is significant is that despite his emphasis upon its local colours, sounds and smells, Malwa manages to become in his fiction a microcosm of the world within which a larger drama of human existence plays itself out. Working within this framework, Gurdial Singh has managed to create richly evocative vignettes of rural life, complete with its distinctive code, its customs and

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conventions. Always alive to its throbbing pulse and rhythm, he sees a village not as static but an every-changing, dynamic unit. Often the trauma of change is chronicled with an unnerving sense of verisimilitude. It's the dialectics of tradition and modernity that tends to give an overarching expression to his insistent social concern.

Marhi Da Deeva (*The Last Flicker*) relocates the twin questions of ownership and dispossession within the ambit of green revolution and redefines them. *Kuwela* probes into the problem of widow remarriage in an orthodox Hindu society. *Rete di ik Muthi* is a sensitive portrayal of how the blind pursuit of materialism leads to slow erosion of human values such as love and fidelity. *Anhe Ghore Da Daan* bemoans the loss of kinship culture, casting an oblique look at the issue of shrinking land-holding and attendant problems of forced migration, unemployment and destitution. Set in the pre-independence India, *Unhoye* (*The Survivors*) records the impact of early forays into the industrialization with a rare precision, of how dehumanisation creeps in, almost imperceptibly. Unlike his other works *Parsa* is not so tangibly located in time-space continuum. As the main focus of the novel is on reclaiming the rich literary/ cultural sources and history of Punjab, social reality impinges on it very marginally. It is almost as if, after having created the narratives of oppression in his earlier novels, in *Parsa,* Gurdial Singh finally breaks free, moving rather self-assuredly towards a narrative of emancipation. For those readers who have walked with him through the fire and brimstone of inferno that Jagseer, Moddan or Bishna live through, *Parsa* brings the ultimate, much-awaited Dantesque vision of *Paradiso.*

Even when he does portray social reality in all its searing passion, as he does in his earlier novels, he takes care not to ever allow it to become either morbid or squeamish. A certain degree of poeticity helps him in smoothing out the jagged edges of social reality. All his novels function the way poetic metaphors do. Loaded with rich cultural signification, the titles such as *Marhi Da Deeva, Rete Di IK Muthi, Addh Chanini Raat* et al sometimes acquire a suggestive power far beyond their immediate context. It's his poetic vision, which ultimately liberates, offering a transcendent edge to everything he so feelingly portrays.

Gurdial Singh's creative imagination is imbued with a rare sense of synthesising power. Like a true artist, he understands the dilemmas and conflict of both art and life exceedingly well. No wonder, his poetic effusions go so very well with a restrained expression and an economy of detail. He is a minimalist in the true sense of the word, as he manages to make it not just an expression of his style; rather the very texture of his vision and thought. No wonder, he is able to strike a precarious, though fine balance between the narrative and the dramatic, the personal and the historical, the political and the artistic. Nowhere does it become more conspicuous than in his all-enveloping view of life. On being asked about it once, Gurdial Singh is reported to have quipped, "Had I not taken to writing, I would have probably exploded. So, my life-view is nothing if not tragic."[5] For him, tragedy is not a by-product of a fortuitous set of circumstances or an ingrained personal failing. It is immanent in the very condition of being human or rather becoming so, result of a constant dialectical struggle between the two. It is an expression, even a triumphant assertion of man's unending search for the classical values of honour, dignity and self-respect. Such a view of life confers no heroism; it can't even induce despair or defeatism.

In novel after novel, Gurdial Singh succeeds in renewing our faith in the irrepressible spirit of human nature and the undying power of human endurance. On being asked, how he felt on receiving *Jnanpith*, the most coveted literary award, he is believed to have said, "It's recognition of those who live in my pages."[6] Needless to say, only Gurdial Singh could have justifiably made such a claim. In his case, *Jnanpith* is not just a personal triumph of an individual, but of all those who are still fighting rather desperately for the retrieval of honour and dignity that history has stoutly denied to them through the ages.

Cultural Memory as an Alterity

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, one thing is quite clear that though Gurdial Singh may be said to belong to the mainstream tradition of the Punjabi novel, all along, his novels have synergized this tradition from below. Rather than function within the restrictive framework of the dominant tradition, he has constantly interrogated, even subverted and deconstructed it from the perspective of folk traditions residing in the popular consciousness. Rejecting the conventional notion of official, monumental historiography, all along, he has strongly advocated and subscribed to the notion of the worm's eye view of history. Often the representations of cultural history or the folk representations within the dominant tradition are seen in terms of alterity, which challenges the conventional notions of chronological, linear, and dominant history or the discourse constituted by it. Not only does Gurdial Singh locate his narratives within the larger space of cultural history, but he also posits 'cultural memory,'[7] an alterity within the framework of cultural history, as the basic trope for constructing his novels. In several of his novels, including *Parsa*, cultural memory functions

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as the basic structuring device for constituting a discourse that runs counter to the dominant discourse(s).

The notion of 'cultural memory' emerged in the social sciences in the wake of the World War II and the horrors of Nazism or the untold sufferings of the Jews in Germany.[8] It is only when the fragmented or fragmentary accounts of the holocaust began to emerge out of the persecuted minority of Jews who survived its horrors that 'cultural memory' became a worthwhile area of investigation for the social scientists. To this extent, it would not be wrong to say that the notion of 'cultural memory' is implicated in a definitive sense of historical consciousness. Often seen as a reaction against systematic, willful attempts of official, monumental historiography to suppress the historical memories, especially of a very brutal, inhuman nature, it takes on the form of dialectics of "remembering and forgetting," as has been emphasized by Jen Brockmeier.[9] He goes on to suggest that "in this discourse, narrative practices are of central importance because they combine various cultural symbol systems, integrating them within one symbolic space." According to him, three narrative orders i.e., "the linguistic, semiotic and performative or discursive of any artwork" are examined as these "constitute a mnemonic system, a symbolic space of remembering and forgetting in which the time orders of past and present are continuously recombined."[10] For this reason, the cultural memory is said to operate in all those cultures and communities where people have either been oppressed and subjected to the process of willful suppression, or where the complex processes of hegemonic control and subsequent 'cultural repression' or 'amnesia' have taken place. If seen from this perspective, cultural memory may be perceived as an attempt to come to terms with the repressed contents and/or processes of history and is necessitated by the reclamation of subjectivity, which is threatened with extinction, especially in face of multiple historical oppressions. The extent to which 'cultural memory' plays a decisive role in the restitution or reclamation of subjectivity, it could be said to become complicit with the process of identity-formation or identity-construction, too.[11] It's another matter that this process of identity formation is recapitulated through a notion of history, which is not only unconventional but also pre-supposes a non-linear, discontinuous, non-chronological and anti-authoritarian representation. It is precisely this notion that Foucault supports when he refers to the discontinuous processes of history or points toward the presence of the significant gaps, silences and fissures in our reading of history.[12] To put it somewhat differently, the cultural memory could be said to reside in those fissures, gaps and silences or in the residual elements where the history could be said to deconstruct itself. For this reason, its reclamation is possible only through such non-hierarchical, cultural sources as the folk stories, songs, or little narratives of the people as opposed to the grand, universalizing narratives of the big and the powerful. In other words, the ideology behind this process of reclaiming 'cultural memory' is definitely anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalistic, anti-imperialistic and anti-hegemonic. To put it somewhat differently, 'cultural memory' constitutes a counter-hegemonic discourse, which tends to interrogate and subvert the assumptions of cultural dominance and hegemony operating within a culture.

It also needs to be pointed out that despite all its individualistic articulations, cultural memory, often enough, is as intensely personal as it is representatively communal or collective.[13] It essentially posits a situation where the distinction between the 'individual memory' and the 'collective memory' ceases to exist, as the individual is necessarily seen only as a carrier of the cultural code of 'collective memories.' Not only do the cultural memories reside inside an individual, but they also manifest themselves in and through the life-processes of an individual. As the novel often deals with the fate and fortunes of the individual characters, it has the potential to turn into an extremely fascinating site for the reclamation of cultural memory. It is as though the past becomes a living reality or entity, with its present-ness becoming a pre-text for both what is 'remembered' as much as what is conveniently 'forgotten.' In other words, the novel becomes an archeology of hidden as well as revealed knowledge about the past or its continued, everlasting presence. Apart from its present-ness, another fact that needs to be stressed in relation to the fictional representation of cultural memory is that being what it is; memory often displays a characteristic tendency for a 'spill-over effect.' Not only do the memories tend to constantly elide, and go through the process of slippage (also called forgetting), but often display an equally strong tendency for simply running through the butter fingers. This is precisely why it almost becomes imperative for a fictional work dealing with cultural memories to take recourse to the framing device for structuring the events, situations and anecdotes, which can only be perceived or read, if effectively framed. Framing device marks off the boundaries of human memory, provides space for the diversified, rich material, and also provides the 'archival traces' through which memories become recognizable, identifiable, even decipherable. It is for this reason that sometimes such narratives are also known as the "Narratives of Recovery,"[14] as Marita Sturken suggests through her catch-phrase.

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Parsa as a Significant Cultural Text

Having said this, we now look into this question of how and in what different ways Gurdial Singh's novel *Parsa* could be perceived as an effective site for the cultural memory of its people, their poetry, language and history. However, before we explore these aspects it is important to see how *Parsa* is completely different from the other novels of Gurdial Singh, and why it must be looked upon as a significant cultural text. Unlike the other novels of Gurdial Singh, *Parsa* operates simultaneously within a dual frame of time and space i.e. the narrative time-space and the comic or eternal/epic time-space. Parsa, the main protagonist, lives at two different levels at the same time, moving freely, and imperceptibly, from one end of the spectrum to another. In other words, if the other novels of Gurdial Singh bear the burden of history and its multiple oppressions, *Parsa* seeks to create its own logic of emancipation or liberation. If in the other novels, his main purpose is to create the 'narratives of oppression,' in *Parsa*, he is certainly in a far more transgressive mode as he manages to create here, what one may only describe as, a 'narrative of liberation.' This fact has certainly been lost on a number of Punjabi critics who have consistently failed to see this significant paradigm shift in Gurdial Singh's novelistic discourse and continue to insist upon reading *Parsa* as an extension of much of his earlier novels. Put simply, their readings of Gurdial Singh fail to respond to the cultural specificities of *Parsa* as much as they fail to take cognizance of the novel's epical scale and the vast, panoramic view it offers of the Punjab's cultural history. Though there are basic stylistic, formal, artistic and ideological differences between the two novels, *Parsa* tends to become a cultural text in the same sense in which Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a cultural text. Both the novelists, it seems, are seeking to excavate their respective cultural situations within a definitive historical/cultural frame. In this kind of fiction, the novelist's concern is not so much with a specific period in history as it is with the whole range of cultural history of a specific culture. As authorized versions of history are neither documented nor reproduced, but systematically challenged and interrogated within the fictional space, such type of fiction allows for only an indirect mediation of history.

Parsa: A Site of Cultural Memory

The cultural frame of this novel *Parsa* begins to define itself the moment we start exploring the rich signification of its innocuous looking title. The title easily reminds us of a mythological character Parshu Rama, who was born a Brahmin and who had declared himself to be the sworn enemy of the Khshatriyas, having taken this deadly vow to eliminate all Khshatriyas from the face of this earth.[15] At this juncture, one may just as well ask oneself: Why is Gurdial Singh extending the cultural frame of his novel beyond history, into the realm of mythology and folk-lore? To put it simply, he is setting up a frame within which cultural history becomes not just an alterity, but perhaps the only discourse available within the novel. Moreover, it has definite implications for his characterization of Parsa, who has been conceived as a complex figure, a product of both mythology and history, a Brahmin by birth and a land-owning Jat by profession. In fact, it is by invoking this context that Gurdial Singh is able to reconstruct a specific notion of the cultural history of Punjab, within which crossing over of the boundaries of caste is as real as is the transgression of the boundaries of discourse. For it is only within such a frame that Gurdial Singh can possibly situate or locate his vision of syncretism of the Punjabi traditions, where the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh identities are not constituted separately, but are caught up in a melee of time and history, constantly shaping and re-shaping each other.[16]

Cultural Memory & Individual Identity

In more ways than one, Parsa, the main protagonist has been presented as both a witness to the processes of history and as an active participant in them, both as a worthy inheritor of the cultural memory and tradition, and also its worst denouncer and critic. This kind of dichotomy is built into the very conception of Parsa's character, and is evident in the way in which he is located, not in the actual physical, social or moral space but instead within the plural, folk and amoral cultural space, where the rigid caste boundaries of Jat-Brahmin are as irrelevant as are the material and historical contingencies of his situation. The point that Gurdial Singh is making here is simple enough. He thus manages to establish the fact that the cultural history neither supports nor legitimizes the whole idea of caste-divisions, which in any case, has become irrelevant and unsustainable. The sociology of such caste-distinctions in our contemporary society, he appears to be suggesting, is far more complex than is often realized.[17] As the division of labour and the principle of specialization have now long ceased to be the determining factors, there is much greater intra-mobility between and across the different caste-formations in an Indian/Punjabi situation than is widely accepted. And it is this kind of interpenetration of the caste boundaries that allows Parsa the advantage of the proverbial Brahmanical memory (which is traditionally

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regarded as the result of a long established practice of memorizing the *Vedas*, but in his case, is the result of his inheritance of the eclectic folk tradition of Sufism), and also his Jat-like inherent rebelliousness, non-conformism, and almost intransigent, self-willed rigidity. If Parsa refuses to live by any code other than the one he defines, it is only because he posits himself outside the framework of conventional social morality. His refusal to accept or honour any social, moral or religious code is what testifies to his status as an archetypal rebel, an eternal outsider, who lives life purely on his own terms.

There is another aspect of Parsa's character that deserves a somewhat closer scrutiny and attention. Though he has had no formal or informal education as such, it appears, as though the entire folk tradition not only lives inside him but is also readily available to him at recall. In his moments of intense pain or joy, he often breaks forth into snatches of poetry that he has neither heard nor read. Only on closer scrutiny do we discover that what he often sings rather unselfconsciously are but the eternal words of Farid, Guru Nanak, Bulleh Shah or Waris Shah et al. of course, sung in a highly inflected, even conflated style. Significantly, his attempts at reclaiming cultural memory are intensely personal as he often plays his own variations on the songs of the Sufi poets, who constitute, as it were, the most precious collective heritage of the Punjabis, even today. If at all, there is any religion Parsa either believes in or subscribes to, it is the all embracing mysticism of a Sufi, who looks upon both life and death, with much the same unconcern, indifference and detachment. On the occasion of his wife's premature death, he performs her cremation without much fuss, blatantly refusing to go through a set of rituals or ceremonies, none of which he personally believes in. Though he brings up his three sons single-handed, he neither has great expectations of them nor does he try to control or run their lives in any way. Initially, when his elder sons leave him one by one, he simply acquiesces, and refuses to even lodge personal protest with either of them. Later, when his youngest son, Basanta, joins in with the Naxalites and leaves home, he makes no effort whatsoever to either wean him away or dissuade him. On learning of Basanta's death later in the police custody, he remains impassive, going through all the formalities as if it were someone else's tragedy. This is not to suggest that in Parsa, Gurdial Singh has created an emotionally vapid or an atrophied character, someone who is reminiscent of Meursault in Albert Camus' *The Outsider*. Much less than that, Gurdial has, in fact, bestowed this character with so much of emotional plenitude and richness that he only thinks it is worthwhile to invest his emotion, not squander it away. That he is both capable of emotional plenitude and rich investments is evident from the way in which he goes about taking moral responsibility, initially for Mukhtiar Kaur and then their young son, though he could have easily discarded them both. His decision to pick up threads and start life all over again with Savitri and the son he had through Mukhtiar Kaur, is a fair testimony to his personal philosophy of life, which demands that human beings, too, must seek renewal and reconstruction almost as naturally as does the nature. He sees no contradiction between the human and the natural worlds, and his acceptance of life as well as destiny essentially springs from this kind of understanding he has.

Cultural Memory & State Repression

The Punjab has had a long and established history of the state repression, the earliest recorded memories of which easily go back to the Mughals, who invaded this territory, and continue well through the later phases when the British finally managed to occupy this terrain in 1849.[18] There is a certain view of the Punjab's history which claims that even in the post-Independence phase there has hardly been any let up or extenuation of the circumstances. It is believed by some that the process of state repression only became much worse, even more subversive after India became a free nation, as now it was practiced by our own people, not the foreigners or the cultural outsiders, as was the case earlier. Regardless of whether or not we go along with this view of the Punjab's history, the fact remains that in the post-Independence phase, Punjab has witnessed a number of ideologically driven movements such as the Naxalite movement of the 1960s, supported by the hard-core Marxist ideology, the movement for the creation of Punjabi Subha, again supported by a political outfit called the Akalis, and a more militant movement of the 1980s, supported by the hardliners and terrorists among the Sikh nationalist organizations. One way or the other, it is this long history of the state repression that has led to the suppression of the people's history and its fissured contents. Though Gurdial Singh has purposively not located his novel *Parsa* in a specific time-space continuum or historical context, he has imbued his narrative with non-linear, non-chronological sense of historical consciousness, which becomes *inter alia*, a form of folk, cultural history. While no specific references have been made to the Naxalite movement of the 1960s, the entire context is poetically evoked through Basanta's involvement and complicity with it. The entire history of how the young boys, especially from the rural background initially jumped on to this bandwagon, faced

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police atrocities and custodial deaths, before the movement began to die down, having lost its ideological impetus and credibility, has been captured in *Parsa* with sure, almost deft strokes. However, it is not too difficult to see where the personal sympathies of the novelist essentially belong, provided we understand the absorption with which he has created the character of Master, the main ideologue. Gurdial Singh does understand that though this movement may have largely failed to realize its socio-economic objectives of social justice and/or a more equitable re-distribution of land among the landless, it certainly did leave behind a very rich legacy of poetry that can hardly be ever ignored. To an extent, *Parsa's* poetic inheritance spreads as far back as Farid and Guru Nanak on the one hand, and Shiv Batalvi, Surjit Pattar and Paash, on the other. In other words, in his attempts at recovering the cultural memory, Gurdial abolishes the facetious distinction between the poetic and the political, which, in any case, doesn't seem to exist at the ground level of popular consciousness.

Cultural Memory & Fictive Time/Space Consciousness

As already pointed out, the time-space frame of *Parsa* has been very carefully crafted and structured. Unlike other novels of Gurdial Singh, this particular novel is strategically set within the dual time-frame, with Parsa moving freely between these two disparate, unrelated time-zones, also serving as an important connecting link between the two. (I may emphasize here that I'm not using this notion of double time-frame in the sense in which it has been used by Christian Metz, but essentially in the sense in which T.S. Eliot has used it in his famous play *Murder in the Cathedral*.[18] Christian Metz says, "Narrative is a Ödoubly temporal sequenceÖ There is the time of the thing told and the time of the narrative (the time of the signified and the time of the signifier). This duality not only renders possible all the temporal distortions that are commonplace in narratives...More basically, it invites us to consider that one of the functions of narrative is to invent one time scheme in terms of another time scheme."[19] However, T.S. Eliot re-conceptualizes it in terms of 'temporality' and 'timelessness'). On the one hand, Gurdial Singh is concerned about the notion of temporality and so Parsa is made to function within the specificities of time, place and action. On the other, he also realizes that there is another, perhaps more significant trans-human, trans-historical, cosmic dimension of 'time' as well. It is the recognition of this time-scale that gives to the novel a transcendent character and sweep, transforming it from just another folk narrative into a significant cultural text. As far as the conception of the novelistic space is concerned, it has been conceived in both the terms; the real, sociological/cultural as well as the poetic, psychological. While the sociological dimension of space is reflected in the way in which linearity of the narrative is emphasized, its psychological dimension is reflected in the way linearity is disrupted, giving it a transcendent sweep of space and history. Parsa lives at the conjunction of these two distinctive time-space conceptions, almost at the same time. It is in this sense that his consciousness becomes the ultimate battleground for mediating the eternal dilemmas of man in relation to other men, time, history and also timelessness. It's here that the entire game of cultural memory, polarized by the two extremes of 'remembering and forgetting,' 'amnesia and recovery' is played out. As memory fails to follow the predictable pattern of linearity, so the narrative, too, doesn't organise itself in accordance with the principle of linearity.

This might create an impression that the narrative is 'focalized' in Parsa's consciousness, which it is not. Though Gurdial Singh has primarily used the technique of 'third person narrator' throughout, he has refused to privilege a particular viewpoint, a definitive perspective or a dominant ideology. This is achieved in a variety of ways. First, he uses a number of framing devices which lend a definite degree of clinical objectivity to his narration. Besides, we don't always view the situations or incidents only through the eyes of Parsa. Not only do the strands of 'focalization' keep shifting in the narrative, but the vulnerability of Parsa's point of view is also constantly exposed through the dogged refusal of his sons, Jetha and Pohla, to fall in line with him or Basanta's choice to lead a life his father wouldn't have ever approved of. In more ways than one, both Basanta, his youngest son, and Tindi, his siri, become not just the commentators, but virtually the surrogate protagonists of this story, too. Tindi's relationship with Parsa is vaguely reminiscent of Lear's relationship with the Fool in *King Lear*. It is through the mediation of Tindi, who represents the fascinating world of folk stories, folk songs and folk wisdom (which is what Parsa shares with him often) that Gurdial Singh deconstructs both history and dominant ideology.[20] Going far beyond his expectations, it is Tindi who proves to be much more than a son to Parsa, something he hadn't ever imagined. His acceptance of Tindi toward the end of the novel marks an important stage in the ultimate integration of his individual/collective psyche. This is how he manages to synthesise the residual, vestigial element of "lowliness" into his supposedly "high and mighty" Brahmanical self.

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A number of Punjabi critics have denounced *Parsa* on the grounds that here Gurdial Singh has abandoned his critical concern for the dispossessed and the marginalized, and somehow become trapped in the numbo-jumbo of such abstractions as *karma*, *dharma* and/or man's relationship with nature.[21] No doubt, Gurdial Singh initially built his reputation by churning out, one after the other, the 'narratives of oppression,' and by so doing, also succeeded in exorcizing his impinging sense of socio-economic oppression that rattled him through his youth and middle-age. In *Parsa*, he has created a novel that transcends the narrow boundaries of caste and class, dominant and marginalized, high and low, and moves toward a more integrated vision of human consciousness, where the dualities of all kind simply cease to exist. It is important to stress here that Gurdial Singh's vision is not located so much in the exclusionary or dominant Hindu view of life or Sankara's philosophy of monism, as much as it is within the eclectic and egalitarian notion of Sufi mysticism, popular in folk consciousness.

Cultural Memory & Narrative Framing

It has already been suggested earlier that the cultural memory necessarily needs the mediation of a framing device, if the 'spill-over' is to be avoided and its encryption is to be successfully realized. Conscious of this fact, Gurdial Singh has used framing device for structuring a variety of incidents and situations in this novel. For instance, there is a kind of pattern that runs through Parsa's life, as is evident from the way in which an incident involving his father Sarupa is narrated right in the beginning. To an extent, this is primarily to suggest that Parsa is the inheritor of his 'karmic destiny' as much as he is a victim of a curse his family is afflicted with. Like his father, Parsa, too, gets embroiled in a physical fight and emerges triumphant, and like so many of his ancestors, he, too, is condemned to become a widower at a relatively young age and bring up his children single-handed. It goes to the credit of Gurdial Singh that he manages to create a narrative that doesn't simply legitimize this pattern of life but breaches it, as it were, thus creating unimaginable possibilities for Parsa's vertical growth in the process.

Another framing device used very effectively in the novel is the story-within-a-story kind of a frame, essentially a carryover from *The Mahabharata* and *The Panchtantra Tales*. It is no coincidence that the novel opens with a *Pauranik* tale about Hirnayakashyapa, the legendary demon-king, who was Prahlad's father, and was ultimately killed by Narsingha, one of the incarnations of Vishnu.[22] By thus framing the narrative with this mythological story, Gurdial Singh not only manages to extend the context of his novel beyond history, but also invokes a shared cultural context within which the moral problems confronting the characters must be examined. In the immediate context, it offers a moral twist to the fight that first Sarupa and then Parsa puts up for the vindication of personal valour and honour, and later, it becomes a metonymic frame for the moral choices other characters such as Jetha, Pohla and Basanta make from time to time. Put simply, if Gurdial Singh has created any specific moral frame for judging or evaluating the actions or deeds of his characters, it is defined only in terms of various tales, mythological or folk, he insinuates into the narrative, time and again. For instance, much before Parsa comes into contact with Mukhtiar Kaur and enters into a physical relationship with her, we have a folk-tale framing the entire incident and guiding our moral perceptions, too. It is the tale of a physically strong young man who refuses to gratify the carnal needs of a married young girl (who approaches him for this purpose), simply on the grounds that she belongs to another man. What he fails to realize is that her husband, being mentally retarded, is unable to fulfil her needs. Going beyond the commonsensical, sociological view of morality, Gurdial Singh explores its trans-human, cosmic dimensions, by suggesting that a seeker in one situation could also be a giver in another. This is what the folk tale essentially demonstrates when the same young man has to beg that very woman for the sweat off her palms to get his skin-rash healed. It is obvious that Gurdial Singh would not like us to judge Parsa-Mukhtiar Kaur episode from the standpoint of conventional or commonsensical view of morality. Nothing that Parsa ever does actually fits into the frame of ordinary logic. It is only by defying this logic of conventionality that he manages to liberate himself from the self-limiting constraints of ordinariness that often chain us down to our own small dreams, desires and fears. No wonder, despite being a householder, he is shown miles ahead of a sadhu he meets in Haridwar. If Parsa is able to acquire a larger than life stature towards the end of the novel, towering far above the level of the ordinary mortals and dwarfing virtually every other character in the novel, it is only because he shows innate strength and courage in defying all the given frames, and displays almost existential doggedness in accepting the consequences of his own actions and choices.

Gurdial Singh's purpose in using the device of a framed tale is two-fold; to provide a frame within which a vast repertoire of cultural memories can be contained and to create a character who ultimately transgresses all frames and grows beyond them. In the person of Parsa, he has certainly created such a character. And by using

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the stories (drawn mostly from the folk tradition) for framing the incidents and situations, Gurdial Singh allows the reader the freedom to interpret the novel, without the mediation of the narrator or the author. It is in this double sense that *Parsa,* the novel and the character, tend to become what I earlier described as the 'narrative of liberation or emancipation.'

Conclusion

To conclude, one may say that in *Parsa*, Gurdial Singh has managed to create the narrative space within which cultural memory/history and/or caste hierarchies can effectively be subjected to a process of re-negotiation. Let me emphasize here that I'm not using the term 'narrative' in its more specialized sense in which it is often used in 'Narratology,' but in its most generalized sense where it is considered almost co-terminus with novel. Though novel has traditionally been seen as a sociological tract, over the years, there has been a definitive change in our perception of its role and function. Novel is no longer seen only as a form of representation in the modernist or the pre-modernist sense, but is increasingly perceived as a self-reflexive genre, with a specific archaeological function of digging into the past. However, this archaeological digging into the past is somewhat different from its engagement with history (which gave rise to the historical novel per se), as it liberates it from the well-defined, structured notions of reality, representation and fixed notion of identity. Now, that the structured notions of reality and fiction have collapsed, 'fictive space' has concomitantly, re-negotiated its internal structure, as also its modes of representation. In fact, it has now ceased to be a 'space' and has instead become a 'site' both for the inscription and the excavation of personal/cultural memory and/or history. To an extent, this is what has now made novel into a 'site' for the contestation of multiple ideologies, which is what *Parsa,* too, tends to become, should I now say, fairly successfully.

Notes

1. Plato, *The Republic,* trans., by A. D. Linday, London: The David Campbell Publishers Ltd., 1992, pp. 282-286. Though Plato introduces this comparison between the painter/poet and carpenter in these specific pages of Book X, it constitutes part of his much larger discussion on the Theory of Forms, which he develops through *The Republic*.
2. This entire discussion derives itself from my reading of several histories of the Punjabi literature. However, the section on Gurdial Singh is based upon my reading of his work. For more comprehensive analysis, see Kartar Singh Duggal and Sant Singh Sekhon (1992), *A History of Punjabi Literature,* New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
3. As quoted in the postscript to Gurdial Singh's *Marhi Da Deewa*, Chandigarh: Lokgeet Prakashan, p. 167. Though the original quotation is in Hindi, it has been reproduced in the text in Punjabi and the English translation in this case, as in several other similar cases, is mine.
4. Gurdial Singh, *Parsa,* trans., Rana Nayar, New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2000, p. 242.
5. As quoted to the author in an interview published in *The Tribune,* Sunday Reading, June 16, 1996, p. 5.
6. As quoted to the author in an unpublished, personal interview.
7. 'Cultural Memory' is a concept introduced to the archaeological disciplines by Jan Assmann who defines it "as the outer dimension of human memory" embracing two different concepts: "memory culture" (*Erinnerungskultur*) and "reference to the past" (*Vergangenheitsberzug*). Memory culture is the process by which a society ensures cultural continuity by preserving, with the help of cultural mnemonics, its collective knowledge from one generation to the next, rendering it possible for the next generations to *reconstruct* their cultural identity. When we speak about cultural memory, we are including in this definition two distinct characteristics: (1) the survival of a historically, politically and socially marginalized group of people, and (2) the role of spirituality as a form of resistance." (p. 1). As Jan Assmann's writings are mostly in the German language and are not available directly, I have accessed his ideas through Jeanette Rodriguez & Ted Fortier's book. For detailed exposition of the concept, see, Jeanette Rodriguez & Ted Fortier (2007), *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith & Identity,* Austin: University of Texas Press. For the relationship between the individual and the social memory, see, Paul Connerton (1989), *How Societies Remember,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. And for the relationship between cultural memory, narrative framing and identity, see, Lewis P. Hinchman, Sandra K. Hinchman (eds.) (2001), *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences,* New York: State university of New York Press, and Introduction by Mieke Bal in Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe & Leo Spitzer (eds.) (1999), *Acts of Memory: Cultural recall in the Present,* Hanover: Dartmouth College Press.
8. This fact has been stated by Jeanette Rodriguez & Ted Terrier in their Preface (ix-x) to the book quoted above, and has also been corroborated by Michael Stewart in his article quoted below.
9. "Memory and Forgetting" are the twin processes that Jen Brockmierer associates with 'Cultural Memory.' My understanding of this concept is borrowed from a secondary source as Brockmierer's essays are, once again, available in the German language, So I'm reproducing Jen Brockmierer as he is quoted by Michal Stewart (September 2004), in "Remembering without Commemoration: The Mnemonics and Politics of Holocaust Memories among European Roma" *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute,* Vol. 10, Issue 3, pp. 561-582.
10. Ibid. p. 568.
11. In their book, Dan Ben-Amos & Liliane Weissberg have sought to explore this relationship between cultural memory and identity-formation. See, Dan Ben-Amos & Liliane Weissberg (1999), *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity,* Michigan: Wayne State University.
12. Though Foucault was not a professional historian, he has done

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much to alter our perception of both history and historiography in the recent times. Challenging the conventional notions of history as a chronological sequencing of events, he has emphasized, in the manner of a true post-structuralist, discontinuous, fragmented, fissured and subterranean notion of history. It is this kind of history that he often excavated in most of his works. In a way, all his works are explorations of the counter-hegemonic discourse of history, attempts to create alternative histories, be it of sexuality, social practices, legal system or madness. For detailed discussion, see, Michel Foucault (2002), *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* London & New York: Routledge.

13. For cultural memory being, at once, an expression of collective as well as individual articulation, see, Paul Connerton (1989), *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
14. Marita Sturken, "Narratives of Recovery: Repressed Memory as Cultural Memory," in Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe & Leo Spitzer (eds.), (1999), *Acts of Memory: Cultural recall in the Present,* Hanover: Dartmouth College Press.
15. Parashurama is believed to be the sixth avatar of Vishnu, born in the Tretayuga to a Brahmin father, Jamadagni, and a Kshatriya mother, Renuka. Parashu means 'axe' in Sanskrit, hence the name Parashurama literally means 'Rama with the axe'. He is believed to have received an axe after undertaking an extended *tapasya* (penance) to please Shiva, the tribal deity, from whom he learned the methods of warfare and other skills. He fought the advancing ocean back thus saving the lands of Konkan and Malabar. Parashurama is said to be a Brahmakshatriya ("warrior Brahman"), the first warrior-saint. His mother was a descendant of the Kshatriya Suryavansha clan that ruled Ayodhya to which Rama also belonged. Once, when Parashurama returned home, he found his mother crying hysterically. When asked why she was crying, she said his father had been killed mercilessly by Kartavirya Arjuna. She beat her chest 21 times in sorrow and grief at her husband's death. In a rage, Parashurama vowed to exterminate the world's Haihaya-Kshatriyas 21 times. He killed the entire clan of Kartavirya Arjuna (or Sahasrarjuna), thus conquering the entire earth, and then conducted the Ashvamedha sacrifice. The Ashvamedha demanded that the kings either submit to Parashurama's imperial position or thwart the sacrifice by defeating him in battle. They did neither and were killed. Parashurama exterminated the world's Haihaya-Kshatriyas 21 times, thus fulfilling his vow. Several accounts of Parashurama's legend are to be found in *The Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavat Purana*. According to some stories available in the Punjabi folk-lore, when Guru Gobind Singh baptized the Sikhs, he was reviving the tradition of Parashurama (warrior-saint). It is for this reason that Gurdial Singh has returned to this story in his novel *Parsa* and used it to look at the dissolution of caste-divisions and the emergence of Brahmin-Jat (Hindu-Sikh) hybridity in the Punjabi culture.
16. There are two ways in which History of the Punjab has been reconstructed so far; as a separatist discourse and as a shared, syncretic discourse. Over the years, attempts have been made either by the Sikh historians or the sectarian historians to construct a Sikh history of the Punjab or a community-oriented history of the Punjab. Such attempts only seek to appropriate history to build or project either the majoritarian or a minoritarian discourse. Such historical constructions have fuelled communal passions and created divisions and fissures within the communities living in the Punjab, even outside. Of late, there have been attempts, endorsed, of course, by the Cambridge School of Historians, to project History of the Punjab as History of the Jats living in Punjab. All such exercises in historical constructions are, apparently, exclusionary in nature and are not only hegemonic but also politically motivated, even biased. On the other hand, a small band of historians continue to emphasize the spirit of Punjabiyat in their constructions, and have managed to resurrect the spirit of commonality, mutuality and multiple identities that are so important for the preservation of our common heritage and principles. One of the ways in which all such notions of official, hegemonic historical constructions can possibly be challenged is by re-constructing or resurrecting the narratives of cultural history and/or cultural memory, for which there is no better form available to us than fiction itself. This explains Gurdial Singh's emphasis on cultural memory and mine as well.
17. The caste-divisions enunciated by the *Manusmriti* and blindly superimposed on the Indian society for centuries now stand invalidated, even defeated, by the historical experience, as people in the contemporary times, no longer follow the profession appropriate to their caste or even their parents' caste. One may hear of a Brahmin following the profession of a farmer/peasant/Jat, as is the case in this particular novel or a Khastriya sustaining himself through Brahmanical professional of teaching. This is how the rigid caste-boundaries have collapsed and consequently, a new sociology of Punjabi culture has emerged. Over a period of time, this new sociology, which draws its strength from the collapse of traditional/conservative caste-divisions, and also throws up renewed consciousness of the caste structures has emerged. Though there is growing recognition of this fact that the rigid caste-distinctions are no longer either possible or sustainable, there are also growing efforts at articulating these caste-divisions in social and political discourse. It is this kind of sociology that lies at the heart of Punjabi life and culture and Gurdial Singh has merely represented its many configurations in his several works of fiction.
18. In his play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, T S Eliot has used a dual time-scheme to present his dramatic action. The play functions both in the temporal (material) and timeless (spiritual) worlds at the same time, as Thomas Beckett, the protagonist, freely moves in and out of these two worlds throughout the play. My understanding is that Gurdial Singh has also conceived the action of the novel at two levels, much in the way as Eliot has done.
19. Christian Metz (1974), *Film Language: A Semiotics of Cinema*, trans., Michael Taylor (New York, 1974), p.18.
20. Parsa is not a hero in the conventional sense, as he consistently refuses to fit into all our known constructions of a hero. If at all, he can be regarded as a hero, he can be regarded as a folk-hero, who inhabits 'timeless cultural space,' moves freely across the two regions, material and spiritual, and has this uncanny advantage (which no other character of Gurdial Singh seems to enjoy), of being able to observe this world from below as well as above, to feel the anguish of the common man and yet look at his mundane activities with a degree of transcendence. It is by positioning his narrative within this

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cultural space of the folklore and tradition that Gurdial manages to critique social, political and cultural distortions of his times, so incisively. This also enables him to deconstruct all possible hegemonic constructions and dominant ideologies operating within the Punjabi society/culture.

21. On the publication of *Parsa*, a good number of Punjabi critics were extremely unhappy, even disillusioned with Gurdial Singh, for they felt that in this particular work he had abandoned his Marxist perspective and was sliding into the insidious trap of 'karma-dharma' (most of which not only constitutes the main ideological bulwark of the novel, but also the central theme of the multiple discussions Parsa and Pala *Raagi* engage in), he had scrupulously eschewed all his life. They even saw negation of his own Marxist philosophy and ideology in the conception of Parsa. They were equally resentful of the fact that he had chosen to present a Brahmin and not a *Shudra* as his main protagonist. Often, what is often not understood by these critics is that Parsa has been conceived on an epic scale as someone who inheres in his person the entire cultural history (the shared and not the separatist one) of the Punjab. They also fail to see that the dialogue between Parsa and Pala *Raagi* is more in the nature of an internal dialogue, a dialogue between the lower and the higher self, a dialogue between a Brahmin and Sikh peasant, a dialogue between the two discourses they represent. In the person of Parsa, both the aspects of Punjabi culture, knowledge and action, material and spiritual, find the best ever articulation that we have ever had in the Punjabi literature. The novel *Parsa* deals as much with man's relationship with social, economic and political environment as it does with his relationship with forces like faith, destiny, nature and spirituality.
22. Just as Gurdial Singh has used the legend of Parashurama in the title of his novel, he starts off his narrative by referring to the story of Hirnyakashyap According to a story from *Bhagavata Purana*, The Four Kumaras, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana, and Sanatkumara who were the manasaputras of Brahma (sons born from the mind or thought power of Brahma), visited Vaikuntha - the abode of Vishnu, to see him. Due to the strength of their *tapas*, the four Kumaras appeared to be mere children, though they were of great age. Jaya and Vijaya, the gate keepers of the Vaikuntha interrupted Kumaras at the gate, thinking them to be children. They also told the Kumaras that Sri Vishnu was resting and that they could not see him then. The enraged Kumaras replied to Jaya and Vijaya that Vishnu is available for his devotees any time, and cursed both the keepers Jaya and Vijaya, that they would have to give up their divinity, be born on Earth, and live like normal human beings. Vishnu appeared before them and gatekeepers requested Vishnu to lift the curse of the Kumaras. Vishnu says that the curse of Kumaras cannot be reverted. Instead, he gives Jaya and Vijaya two options. The first option is to take seven births on Earth as a devotee of Vishnu, while the second is to take three births as his enemy. After serving either of these sentences, they can re-attain their stature at Vaikuntha and be with him permanently. Jaya and Vijaya could not bear the thought of staying away from Vishnu for seven lives. As a result, they choose to be born three times on Earth even though it would have to be as enemies of Vishnu. In the first life they were born as Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyaksha. Vishnu takes the avatar of Varaha to kill Hiranyaksha, and the Narasimha avatar to kill Hiranyakasipu. In the second life, they were born as Ravana and Kumbhakarna, being defeated by Rama avatar as depicted in the great Hindu epic *Ramayana* during the Tretayuga. Finally, in their third life, they were born as Sishupala and Dantavakra during the time of Krishna also part of the great *Mahabharata* epic which took place during the Dwaparayuga.

    Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyaksha were born to Diti (daughter of Daksha Prajapathi) and Sage Kashyapa. It is said that *asuras* were born to them as a result of their union at the time of sunset, which was said to be an inauspicious time for such a deed. After his brother's death at the hands of the Varaha avatar of Vishnu, Hiranyaksha's brother Hiranyakashipu, started to abhor Lord Vishnu. To which end he decided to attempt to kill Vishnu by gaining mystical powers, which he believed Brahma, the chief among the *devas* would award him if he underwent many years of great austerity and penance just as Brahma has awarded to *Rakshasas* (e.g. such as Vibhishana.) This initially seemed to work as planned with Brahma becoming pleased by Hiranyakashipu's austerities. Brahma thus appeared before Hiranyakashipu and offered him a boon of his choice. Upon Hiranyakashipu's asking for immortality, however, Brahma refused. Hiranyakashipu then requested the following:

    "O my lord, O best of the givers of benediction, grant me that I not die within any residence or outside any residence, during the daytime or at night, nor on the ground or in the sky. Grant me that my death not be brought by any being other than those created by you, nor by any weapon, nor by any human being or animal. Grant me that I not meet death from any entity, living or nonliving. Grant me, further, that I not be killed by any demigod or demon or by any great snake from the lower planets. Since no one can kill you in the battlefield, you have no competitor. Therefore, grant me the benediction that I too may have no rival. Give me sole lordship over all the living entities and presiding deities, and give me all the glories obtained by that position. Furthermore, give me all the mystic powers attained by long austerities and the practice of yoga, for these cannot be lost at any time."

    It is this aspect of the boon that Gurdial Singh has recapitulated in the opening section of the novel. In the opening section, as elsewhere, too, Gurdial Singh has used the story of Hiranyakashipu as a framing device. This mode of 'framing device' helps him invest his narrative with multiple possibilities, while allowing him to scrupulously stay away from becoming a controlling, intrusive presence within the narrative. Gurdial Singh never becomes a narrator/commentator in his fiction; as he scrupulously allows his dramatic narration to speak for itself, a quality that sets him apart from his other contemporaries, even predecessors.

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Ethnicity, Gender and Nationalism in Birendrakumar Bhattacharya's *Yauringam*

PARAG MONI SARMA & NEELAKSHI GOSWAMI

> In my novels one can find the essence of the transitory nature of politics: *Rajpathe Ringieai, Yauringam, Pratipad* are the novels where this nature is manifest. Infact, in other apparently non political humane novels . . . it is inevitable that the political is incidental. I have no regrets for this though some of my readers are at times disturbed. The political is an integral part of the human situation and this has found expression in the works of other Assamese novelists as well – Birendrakumar Bhattacharya[1]

Birendrakumar Bhattacharya is considered to be one of the foremost exponents of the political novel in Assamese literature. Appreciative literature in Assamese delineates the phases of 'Scientific Socialism' and 'Democratic Socialism' in his fiction (Sarma 1983) and lauds his vision of "equality, justice, and humanity" (Mishra2002). Writers intimately inhabit their political environment and it is inevitable that their political and ideological constituencies will manifest themselves in their expressive oeuvre, be it creative or ideological. Literary creations are informed by social, political and historical contexts and there is a complex relation between the literature and the political and social history that engenders such representations. The legacy of colonial modernity dictates the creative attitudes of the Assamese novelists of the twentieth century, and the liberal humanism fostered by it permeates the creative attitudes of novelists of the time. The stress was on the glorification of the role that colonial education can play in 'civilizing' the 'oral' cultures in the margins of the nation. The image of the Assamese school teacher or officer venturing into the hills of the North East, like that of Jivan in *Yauringam,* carrying the light of the script and message of harmony and peace amongst the different warring ethnic groups is a recurring motif. The framework of the Indian nation provided the warring groups the opportunity to resolve differences in a democratic framework. The author clearly acknowledges his own experiences as a teacher in the Christian Venture Mission High School in Ukhrul[2], Manipur, as bedrock for his fictional narration in *Yauringam:*

> With them I traveled into the interior villages. I participated in their festivals, visited their unique institutions and churches. . . they were then living in stirring times and I shared their joys and sorrows. I got my theme and characters out of that moving experience[3]

The genre of Assamese fiction can be perceived as a form that constantly strived to meet the historical requirements of a unifying discourse by accommodating and glorifying cultural subtexts in an attempt to forge a larger national, political, and cultural text. The Assamese novelists were:

> . . . deeply concerned with the rescue of the nation from the disaster which is bound to overtake it unless moral and religious values are restored, particularly in the political field[4]

Marked by the existence of numerous ethnic groups, the literatures of the region voice the continuous and evolving dynamics of a unique relationship that exists between them. The first conscious attempt to narrate the plural nature of the region and portray the diverse ethnic composition was made in Assamese literature, especially in fiction. Early post-independent Assamese literature perceived itself as an integral part of the imperative to narrate the nation and integrate plural entities into the national consciousness. A kind of inclination towards metanarratives was emerging in the first flush of Independence and the conscious attempt was to consolidate a larger Indian identity by generating

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regional identities that accommodates cultural and political subtexts. This was perceived to be an integral part of narrating into a strong, vibrant and new national identity. Early Assamese authors inhabited these socio-political narratives and one should view early writings keeping this appropriative discourse in mind. The earliest novel of prominence in this genre is Rajani Kanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiyori* (1894), which tries to represent one of the prominent ethnic communities in the Northeast, the Misings[5], through the narration of a tragic love story. Yet, such narration often exoticised the ethnic, and saw it as a space where the dictates of a 'civilised' world did not operate. Thus in *Miri Jiyori,* we have the novelist narrating a love story within a clan, and the subsequent trauma of an unwed mother and the travails and suffering that she had to go through. The author was clearly appropriating an ethnic Mising society to Assamese middle class morals, and for all practical purpose, it was an Assamese middleclass narrative with the characters bearing Mising names. In an ethnic community like the Misings, there were inbuilt social mechanisms that could accommodate unwed mothers and resolve forbidden love. It was the ethnic women who had to bear the mainstream 'gaze' and become the object where patriarchy generated moral codes played out, in short a kind of gender stereotyping that sadly persists even today.

After Independence, Kailash Sarma's *Bidrohi Nagar Hatot* (1958), *Anami Naga* (1963) and *Dalimir Sapon* (1972) depicted the Naga way of life and gave the first hint of narrating ethnic assertions and the violence associated with it. But the representation of the violence and lawlessness in the margins of the nation was perhaps an indirect justification of the necessity to bring order and stability, the inevitability of state violence. Later works like Jnanpeeth award wining novel *Mritunjoy* (1977) by Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya and Umakanta Sarma's *Ejak Manuh Ekhan Aranya* (1986) are novels that immediately come to the mind. Both the novels have representation of ethnicity, but the main aim was to forge and consolidate regional and thereby national identities. The first novel has the revolutionary approach to the Independence struggle as its main pre-occupation where ethnic representations are incidental to the main narrative thrust, and how such struggle forms a common legacy that binds the nation together. The second novel is a humanistic depiction of the travails of the diasporic tea labourers in Assam, their emergence as a distinct ethnic identity, and the author's ideal of their final assimilation and integration into the canvas of a larger Assamese society.[6]

In his appreciation of the Sahitya Akademi award winning novel *Yauringam* (1960), Krishna Kumar Mishra calls it a 'prophetic' novel, whose interrogation of the upheaval in Naga life and society was a pointer to the future and an assertion of the democratic ethos of the Nagas: "It was an expression of the dream of democracy and the conclusion a deep optimistic commitment that has been proved to be true in later times."[7] Mishra's effusiveness is reinforced by the author's choice of name: *Yauringam* mean people's rule. Mishra's contention is, however, difficult to accommodate from contemporary social and political vantage, given the protracted political problems that still persist between the Indian government and the Naga political groups and also the simmering inter ethnic tensions amongst the various Naga groups in the formulation and execution of the vision of a Naga nation, separate and distinct from Indian identity.[8]

From the vantage of the present political and social situation in the North East, a rereading of *Yauringam* transcends the paradigm of romantic humanism and reveals a rather complex engagement on the part of the author with ethnic differences and the liminal nature of social and political formation. *Yauringam* treads the difficult path of dealing with other cultures, in trying to delineate the essential difference between the diverse ethnic groups that inhabits the North East fringes of India. Set in the days of the Second World War, the novel opens with a narration of the violation of a Tangkhul girl, Sarengla by Ishewara, a soldier of the occupying Japanese army. Defilement of communal honour through the violation of female sexuality is a recurrent theme of patriarchal discourse and often doubles up as violation of one's homeland. A woman's violation, as Jasodhara Bagchi points out "becomes an exclusionary boundary with which the women's own community preserves its caste-class identity."[9] Bhattacharya's opening is a stock image of patriarchal discourse, and not much different from the tenor set by *Miri Jiyori*: a defiled woman being metonymic of a defiled land. Sarengla degenerates into a fallen woman within her own community. How appropriate is this depiction of Tangkhul society in terms of mainstream nationalistic middle class morals is of course open to interrogation, for behind this portrayal of Tangkhul society remains, to borrow a phrase from Jasodhara Bagchi, a "grand appropriation of female sexuality by the community" (Ibid: 86) and has the familiar element of a moralizing patriarchy, whose source of power over women emanates from a carefully constructed male aggressiveness. Bhattacharya's focus is on the aggressive and violent world of man: Videsselie, Rishang, Khating, Phanitphang, Najek and others. The women are rooted to their own world of mutual jealousy, competing for men and a sense of vulnerability in the

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face of far reaching social and political changes. The ethnic woman here is a 'muted category'. The good woman of patriarchal discourse, like Khutingla, was the upholder of the community honour, while Sarengla is seen as a threat to that honour, a potentially corrupting influence, a fear for her body and sexuality over which the community has lost possession. In the nationalist discourse, the signs of feminity are clearly marked out and include virtues like self sacrifice, religiosity and submission,[10] the parameters along which Sarengla is sought to be redeemed by the author. When "gender relations are made symbolically relevant in nationalist ideology":

> They tend to reproduce a patriarchal view of the family. If the nation is regarded as a metaphoric kin group, then the mother's metaphorical role is to reproduce – to raise children and to provide domestic services. In war imagery, this passive role of women is particularly evident. 'The fathers have fought/and the mothers have wept'. . . if the nation-state is symbolically depicted as a family writ large, then it makes sense to investigate actual family relations in the society in question to find the sources of nationalist imagery. Here we may find that nationalism tends to reproduce and strengthen the gender relations already prevalent in a society. . .[11]

In Bhattacharya's narrative the feminine body perhaps become a site for the writer's conflicting attitudes, an encounter with the mores of a society he was mired in and of a society whose moral values he couldn't perhaps fully fathom.

In his preface to the original Assamese version[12] of *Yaruingam,* Birendrakumar Bhattacharya declares that his stay with the Tangkhul Nagas was an attempt to understand their way of life. But he found it as *difficult as dealing with a stone that can't be lifted.* Denying that his love for their way of life was a love for *primitiveness*, yet he goes on to say that in their *primitiveness* he glimpses constituents of the quest for a new life. He says that the Nagas too are a people, but a different kind of people; beneath the facade of uncompromising iron will lie the beauty of a timeless humanness. These apparent contradictions in his preface clearly points out that the author was on uneven ground, a territory that he was not familiar with. He was clearly trying to move between cultures, perhaps attempting to live another kind of life. This moving between cultures, an engagement with otherness and difference that interrogate the familiar, the *comfortable own* is perhaps central to Yauringam. The narrative clearly rides the tension between the writer's cultural and intellectual conditioning and reaching out to an unfamiliar cultural milieu.

This can be accommodated within contemporary appreciative paradigms like the ethno critical approaches to literature and other expressive behaviours. According to Arnold Krupat, who strongly endorses the idea, "the ethnocritical perspective manifests itself in the form of multiculturalism . . . that particular organisation of cultural studies which engages otherness and difference in such a way as to provoke an interrogation of and a challenge to what we ordinarily take as familiar and our own . . . is consistent with a recognition and legitimation of heterogeneity . . ."[13] It seeks to replace the 'us and them' oppositional mode with a dialogic mode more concerned with difference rather than opposition, and dissolve borders and boundaries from absolute categories to shifting spaces where cultures encounter and deal with each other. Ethnocriticism seeks to appreciate expressive forms against the backdrop of a pervasive and dominant social and political episteme and calls for a legitimation of heterogeneity. It brings into play different conceptual categories like culture, history, imperialism, anthropology, and literature and takes an inter-disciplinary approach to interrogate appropriative discourses. Inimical to the postulations of ethnocriticism is the urge to speak for or interpret the other. This could be a coercive means to appropriate the 'other' to dominating discourses or nationalistic metanarratives. Ethnocritical writing is noncoercive and is situated between cultures and is not an engagement ". . . in writing or in acting out a tragic or comic destiny or identity but, rather with recognizing, accommodating, mediating, or indeed, even bowing under the weight of sheer difference."[14]

At the apparent level, the author was clearly trying to consolidate the Indian nationalist cause, making a conscious attempt to appropriate Najek and Videsselie's militant ethnic assertion to the notion of the Indian nationhood by associating them with Netaji's ideals. In reality, however, Birendrakumar Bhattacharya's interrogation dialogises the emerging parameters of the Indian consciousness of his time in the shifting cultural spaces of the north-eastern fringes of post-independent cartographic reality. Bhattacharya is perhaps adopting, a deconstructive philosophical position in offering an impossible critique of a structure that he himself "inhabits intimately"[15] for as the novel bears out, he was a committed nationalist. However, instead of the predominantly Hindu and Indo-Aryan brand of Nationalism, we have a mostly Christian and Tibeto-mongoloid alternative paradigm, the cultural encounter being represented by the excursion of the likes of Rishang to Calcutta and the Assamese schoolteacher Jivan's excursion into and marriage in the Tanghkul heartland. There is a discernible narrative tension between the author's intellectual veering towards emerging

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metanarratives of nation and nationhood and the autonomous dynamics of an objective portrayal. So we enter the novel with the Angami youth Videsselie's dream of "liberating the whole country and forming an all embracing new nation" a nation under the tutelage of Netaji. However, counterpoised to this was the assertion of the Tangkhul elder and ideologue Ngazek that "Videsselie would not like to stay under anybody. He spoke like a true Naga. A true Naga will give his head first and then his freedom."[16] To Ngazek, to be a Naga was to be free. So, by the time we leave the novel, Videsselie mutate to a Naga rebel who wants to bring freedom to the Naga people like Gandhi had brought freedom to India.

However, counterpoised to this ideal of recovering lost liberty for the Nagas was the cynicism of the likes of Rishang and Khating at the "half crazed Angamis dream."[17] Khating informs Rishang on his coming back from Calcutta that:

> Videsselie is successful in turning young men's mind to agitation. He has a large following. He was raising a guerrilla army supposedly to fight the British. And now that the white men are gone, one would have expected him to have abandoned his plan. But he says he does not accept the new government.[18]

However, to Rishang, maintaining a status quo was important, because it provided the scope for the community's development. Christianity and Indian democracy were the parameters that held for Rishang the potential for the fulfilment of the dreams he had for his community- education, hospitals and employment. Rishang's and Jivan's ideals were the overt coercive strategy of the author to appropriate the Nagas to the nationalistic narrative. The author assumes the role of a spokesperson for the general people in the Tangkhul community and orchestrates the narrative towards his own ideological convictions:

> The majority of the people disliked violence and the idea of secession. But they were helpless. It was the minority coercing the majority into accepting a reality which they did not think inevitable. Rishang was convinced that the people wanted peace.[19]

The author's contention of a minority coercing a majority should be taken at face value and is indicative of where the author's overt affiliation lies. The clash of words between Videsselie and Rishang in the rebel camp after they were kidnapped is an interesting event that helps in the identification of the narrative tension on which the novel is mounted. Videsselie's contention that the Nagas are a 'separate and distinct nation' (ibid; 273) is countered by Rishang's retort that the "Nagas are a distinct group no doubt, but they belong to a great family, I mean the Indian nation'[20] :

> . . .the Nagas are as much Indians as the Assamese or Manipuris. They live in a common territory and under the same administration, and share the same economy. Their present and future are bound up with the fate of the country as much as their past was.21

That Videsselie is himself not a Tangkhul is a subtle authorial insinuation that rebellions are constructed and are etic categories[22], and the image of the frustrated rebel Phanitphang shows the authors belief at the futility of violence:

> . . .so far he had lacked the power to act freely. The underground political work had made his life a miserable hell, where he could see man only as a tool of rebellion, fighting without questioning.[23]

Christianity was in itself an emerging meta-narrative in the Northeast, subsuming the traditional and ethnic way of the communities of the region. In a strange kind of way, Christianity becomes for the author a potent force for consolidating a larger Indian identity. However, beyond authorial intention was the latent disruptive threat present throughout the narrative in the clash between the clans of the Christian Yengmaso and non-Christian Ngathingkhui over the Church on the disputed hillock, which results in the tragic consequence of Yengmaso being mortally injured. Ethnic assertion also involved going back to the religo-socio mores of the past, which would result in dangerous consequences for the nationalistic project, and hence had to be reigned in.

However, Birendrakumar Bhattacharya leaves the novel in muted ambivalence. Videsselie, who had abducted Rishang and Jivan, refuses to punish them leaving justice to history. Yet, Jivan is shot dead by the rebels for preaching peace and Rishang injured by a ricocheting bullet. As Videsselie flees refusing to surrender and join the mainstream, one could sense an emotional non-coercive reaching out towards Videsselie's convictions. Jivan's life remains only "half revealed", and "the people would remember him only as a man of thought – an eccentric."[24] What the author was trying to consciously do was to appropriate the Nagas to the emerging parameters of the Indian Nation. What he also, perhaps unconsciously, succeeded in doing was to polyvocalise the nationalistic discourse by offering an alternative paradigm. This is valuable, for as Homi K. Bhabha has pointed out in his introduction to *Nation and Narration,* it draws "attention to those easily obscured, but highly significant, recesses of the national culture from which alternative constituencies of peoples and

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oppositional analytic capacities may emerge – youth, the everyday, nostalgia, new 'ethnicities', new social movements, 'the politics of difference' . . . and assign new meanings and different directions to the process of historical change"[25]

The self assertion happens at both the social and the personal level in the novel, as Sarengla breaks away from Khutingla's family, thus bringing to an end their mutual jealousy over the favour of Ngathingkhui. This marks an end to their competition set up by the author. Sarengla's acceptance of the renegade Phanitphang into her bed in a deserted cottage is accommodated with the authorial comment that Phanitphang "needed a woman's care and she willingly gave it, without surrendering the dignity of her womanhood"[26] This is in sharp contrast to Jivan, the Assamese school teacher's comment that her liaison with Phanitphang "was something that appeared outrageous to society". His advice to abandon her ways is met with the stoic reply that she was "still attached to the world."[27] This perhaps was Sarengla's redemptive statement, a movement from being the muted to the voiced, and her subsequent miscarriage, the author's *deus ex machina,* abrogates her link with Ishewara, thus paving the way for her rehabilitation in the narrative. Her acceptance of Jivan and Roni's son Kongcheng, the "child of two cultures" who "will be a brother to all"[28] substitutes her role of the biological reproducer of her community and as insurgency takes over Bhattacharya's narrative in *Yauringam*, Sarengla in her own silent way mutates into a self assured character that get back control over her life, an element of sanity amidst conflicting ideals and mutual hatred. As Jivan dies, Rishang realises that the love Sarengla have spoken about is the real love, a love beyond restrictive morals and social structures. In Sarengla's defiance of the stereotype of the fallen woman, and her location within the flux of a tumultuous time, and in her final sense of lonely hurt, one can sense the value of her experience as men plays out their violent and self-destructive games. The figure of the woman can never really totally disappear even from patriarchal and male centred discourses, but like in *Yauringam*, can be subject to violent disfigurement, and often the "medium through which competing discourses represent their claims."[29] Dominant patriarchal constructions of nation, race, class or gender is very often located within the embodied self of the woman, and more dangerously, "may have been accepted and internalized by women as being their defining characteristics,"[30] like the early Sarengla who considered herself to be a sinner and for whom redemption lies in the Bible. It is perhaps time that the 'mainstream' Indian socio-polity moves away from the coercive nationalism that appropriated the 'marginal female' and the 'peripheral ethnic' in the exuberance of the first flush of nation formation, and perhaps "it is imperative to imagine a new transformation of social consciousness which exceeds the reified identities and rigid boundaries invoked by national consciousness . . . facilitate the emergence of what we might, after Said, call an enlightened 'postnationalism'"[31]

The status of literature as practised by the likes of Birendrakumar Bhattacharya in the formation of a national canon is an interesting phenomenon to be interrogated. A 'post nationalist' canon of Indian literature must apparently accommodate oral-derived and written literature that represent and give expression to its peripheral and alternative constituencies, what can be termed as 'emerging' literatures in India. The political imperative of awards (not discounting the obvious literary merit) like Sahitya Akademi and Jnanpeeth, which is a mode of enlarging the scope of 'national literature', by accommodating voices that conform to the overall notion of the nation might be an overt agenda. Thus the graduation of Birendrakumar Bhattacharya from Sahitya Akademi (*Yauringam)* to Jnanpeeth (*Mritunjoy*) can be seen as a movement of the author from the regional canon to the national canon. Such a movement is a complicated process in India, with the politics and poetics of translation and representation thrown in for good. Literature, beyond the realm of the artistic and the creative, is also an act of "social transaction, a transaction involving the process of dissemination as well as reception by a specific audience."[32] It is interesting to note that the first translation of *Yauringam* was published by Christian Literature House in 1984, and in some way or the other, it was felt that it conformed to the missionary agenda in the North East, mainly because it highlighted the positive impact of Christianity on indigenous societies of the North East. Authors like Birendrakumar Bhattacharya, writing from the space of a post colony, and trying to come to terms with the notion of a new found nationhood, articulates through the travails of his characters, how society was trying to emerge from traditional boundaries and coming to terms with new social and political realities. Novels like *Yauringam* are narratives where the "story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society,"[33] and how such restrictive structures were transcended with the help of agential factors, facilitated by the state machinery or humanitarian organisations. The very notion of a national literature is often seen as a third world concept:

> National literatures are constituted by a national sense, or, what may or may not amount to he same thing, by a sense of

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nationalism. Thus national literatures are not necessarily present (not prominent or dominant) in all nation states Ö national literatures are, however, characteristic of the newly independent states of the third world. These later are defined by. . .an experience, the experience of imperial and colonial domination.[34]

If national literature is formed by literary voices of the contributing constituencies of the nation that conform to the notion of the nation, regional literature can be said to be consolidation of such contributing constituencies that are formed by the contribution of the indigenous literary voices of a region. The notion of a regional literature is in itself a problematic area in the North East which is an ad-hoc entity that emerged through the interface of colonial and post colonial mediation, and "points no more than the areas location on India's political map:

Northeast India has been known this way since a radical redrawing of the region's political map in the 1960s. It was a hurried exercise in political engineering: an attempt to manage the independentist rebellions among the Nagas and the Mizos and to nip in the bud as well as to pre-empt, radical political mobilization among other discontented ethnic groups. From today's vantage point this project of political engineering must be pronounced a failure.[35]

In literature, these dimensions finds expression through questions of the marginal/central or written/oral and are areas of contestations. Early scripted literature like Assamese and to some extent Manipuri, which had adopted the Bengali script, are seen as the dominating forces, and writers like Birendrakumar Bhattacharya are often seen as voices of a dominating and appropriating episteme. Such a condition has been described as competing egocentricities where:

We have an incredible multiple of egocentricities arrayed against each other: the Assamese against the Bodos and the Misings and the Karbis; the Karbis against the Dimasas; the Nagas against the Meiteis; the Tangkhuls against the Aos and the Angamis; the Khasis against the Garos and so on.[36]

Such tensions will obviously leave indelible traces in literatures of the North East.

The emerging indigenous literature subsequently adopted the roman script, thanks to the pedagogic initiative of the Church, to pen down what can now be called as the pre dominantly oral-derived literatures of the different communities of the region. It is interesting to note that for most communities, the Bible in translation is the first instance of scripted literature in their language. The gradual emergence of a written literature can be said to be an expression of the interaction and interface of the local/traditional/tribal/ethnic expressive modes with the dominant form of literature patronised by the nation state through various state agencies. Thus, indigenous literature of the North East is an author's adaption of the external forms through the mediation of one's own cultural practices resulting in polyphonic and multifarious expressions of the concepts of self, society, community ethics and aesthetics along with the realisation of being almost the cultural other and yet a part of the nationscape.

Notes

1. Cited in Krishnakumar Mishra, "Birendrakumar Bhattacharyar Uppanyasat Rajnoitik Chetana". *Asomiya Uppanyasar Gati –Prakriti.* (Ed.). Sailen Bharali. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002, p.103
2. Birendrakumar Bhattacharya, like many young Assamese educated youths of the time, started their professional career by going to difficult 'tribal' terrains of the North East as school teachers. This was especially applicable to Nagaland (erstwhile Naga Hills district of Assam), Arunachal Pradesh (Formerly NEFA) and Mizoram (erstwhile Lushai Hills district of Assam). However, Bhattacharya went to the Tangkhul dominated Ukhrul district in Manipur as a teacher in a 'venture' school run by the missionary. The word 'venture' in Assam means an institution run voluntarily without government support and mostly with a non-profit motive and aimed at social betterment and spread of education. Most well known schools and colleges, which were later adopted by the government under a scheme of 'grant in aid', started as 'venture' institutions.
3. Birendrakumar Bhattacharya, *Yauringam: People's Rule.* Guwahati: Christian Literature House, 1984, Preface.
4. P. C. Sabhapandit, *Sociological Study of the Post War Assamese Novel.* Guwahati: Omsons Publications, 1988, p. 124.
5. The Misings are the second largest Tibeto-Mongoloid ethnic group in Assam after the Bodos with a distinctive language and culture of their own. Marriage by elopement is a very common mode and is part of the traditional practice even in the present times. More often than not, marriages by elopement are followed by due social recognition through simple formalities. However, clan endogamy is a taboo, and would involve annulment of such alliances, and any 'illegitimate' child born of such a union would be taken care of by the community by delegation of responsibility. It would not involve the heartless persecution or ostracisation as depicted by Rajani Kanta Bordoloi.
6. Parag Moni Sarma, "Ethnicity in the narration of the Northeast: A study with reference to Assamese Fiction". *Punjab Journal of English Studies. Volume XXI.* (2006) 49-57. Amritsar: GNDU, p.50.
7. Krishnakumar Mishra, "Birendrakumar Bhattacharyar Uppanyasat Rajnoitik Chetana". *Asomiya Uppanyasar Gati –Prakriti.* (Ed.). Sailen Bharali. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002, p.106
8. The 'Naga Problem' is a complex political problem and only a short hint can be given here. The Naga political movement is split into two strong factions, the NSCN (Issac Muivah) and NSCN (Khaplang), which are involved in fratricidal clashes.

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Each faction has their constituent Naga ethnic groups, and age old inter ethnic dynamics continues well into the present time. In Manipur, the Metei-Naga clash is an age old legacy which was rekindled by the recent demand of NSCN (IM) to include all Naga inhabited areas in the formation of a Naga nation. In an atmosphere of violence and insurgency, the very concept of 'people's rule' seems to be a cruel irony and the common people is caught between the muzzle of the 'revolutionaries' and the State.

9. Jasodhara Bagchi, "Female Sexuality and Community in Jyotirmoyee Devi's *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga". Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity.* (Ed.). Meenakshi Thapan. Delhi: OUP, 1997, p.75.
10. Thapan, *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity*, p. 28.
11. Eriksen, Thomas Hylland Eriksen,. 2002. *Ethnicity and Nationalism.* London: Pluto Press, 2002, p. 172.
12. The novel was first published in 1960 in Assamese with a preface that delineated the authors experience in Ukhrul. In 1984, the author translated the novel into English, but many of the points raised in the preface to the Assamese originals were not reiterated and the narrative also varied in the different places. This interpretation takes into account both the versions.
13. Arnold Krupat is an American scholar of Native American Literary forms who tries to generate appreciative paradigms to understand native forms against the backdrop of a pervasive hegemony of western appreciative approaches. His ethno critical perspective takes into account emic categories that is not necessarily in opposition to mainstream western forms, but mediates differences and seeks to understand how it shapes the world view of the marginal natives. There are remarkable similarities in the contexts where the expressive traditions of native America and indigenous North East are shaped, and an appreciation of such forms further democratizes the post-colonial approaches to indigenous and marginal expressive forms. (See Arnold Krupat, *Ethnocriticism: Ethnography, History, Literature.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, p. 3.)
14. Ibid., p. 124.
15. Ibid., p.8.
16. Birendrakumar Bhattacharya, 1998 (1960). *Yauringam.* Guwahati: Lawyers Book Stall,1960, pp. 26-27.
17. Ibid., p. 15.
18. Ibid., pp. 178-179.
19. Ibid., p. 200.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., p. 318.
22. There are remarkable similarities between Bhattacharyas fictional narrative and the present context. The two main leaders of the Naga nationalistic movements, Issac Muivah and Khaplang are not from Nagaland; while Muivah, in a kind of role reversal of Bhattacharya's fiction, is a Tangkhul from Manipur, Khaplang is from Myanmar. Rivals of both often points out to the fact that they are not 'Nagas' in the true sense, since they are not from Nagaland.
23. Bhattacharya, *Yauringam*, p.247.
24. Bhattacharya, *Yauringam: People's Rule*, p.323.
25. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, p. 3.
26. Bhattacharya, *Yauringam: People's Rule*, p.153.
27. Ibid., p. 193.
28. Ibid., p. 232,
29. Leela Gandhi,. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction.* New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 1998, p. 90.
30. Thapan, *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity*, p.11.
31. Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, p. 124.
32. (Forbes, Jack Forbes, "Colonialism and Native American Literature". *Wicaza Sa Review Volume 3* (1987), p. 23.
33. Fredrick Jameson, in his influential essay, identifies third world literature as particularly concerened with issues of nationalism, which is a feature of post colonial societies in trying to come to grasp with the notion of a new found nationhood remarkably different from the one that existed in the pre colonial times. On the other hand, in first world nations, the consolodative parameters of a nation is intrinsic and are based on different parameters of industry and economy, unlike third world nations where cultural and linguistic nationalism are seen as consolidative factors, and are factors of political and social empowerment.
34. Arnold Krupat, *The Voice in the Margin.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, p. 212.
35. (Baruah 2007: 04). Baruah, Sanjib Baruah, *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of north East India.* New Delhi: OUP, 2007, p.4.
36. Mrinal Miri, " Two Views of the North East". *Problems of Ethnicity in the North East India.* (Ed.). B.B. Kumar. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2007, p. 5.

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Consumption As Dharma: Reading Govardhanram Tripathi's *Sarasvatichandra*

TRIDIP SUHRUD

I

"I wish to produce, or see produced, not this or that event–but a people who shall be higher and stronger than they are, who shall be better able to look and manage for themselves than is the present *helpless* generation of my educated and uneducated countrymen. What kind of a nation that should be and how that spark should be kindled for the organic flame: these were, and are, the problems before my mind. I lay down this as, for the present, the only one fixed objective before me..."[1]

With these words Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi (1855-1907) articulates his *svadharma*. This paper attempts to understand Govardhanram's project of tempering the minds and souls of his countrymen through his Gujarati classic novel *Sarasvatichandra* (1887-1901)[2], with supplementary inputs from the author's notes to himself, *Scrap Books*[3] and the biography of his daughter *Lilavati Jivankala*.[4]

For Govardhanram, the original cause of the universe lies in what he describes as the Great Will or the Great Force. Individual beings are a mere point, a manifestation of the Great Will. "Our will is a manifestation, at a point, of his will. His will is universal, ours is a point of it."[5] The ontological vocation of human beings it to understand the Great Will and function in harmony with it. "We are unable to enter into the actual motives of the Great Will, but we can understand and join its music and poetry... Our final cause – like all final causes – is to understand our proper function in this symphony and join it properly."[6]

A perfect conscience, according to Govardhanram, recognises that "I is a fiction,"[7] and it is at this moment of recognition of self-identity that the individual being is in perfect harmony and union with the Great Will. In this union and realisation of identity lies salvation. But how is this salvation to be attained? The central question for Govardhanram is, how can an individual reconcile his vocation of final union with the Great Force, and his obligation towards his family, the society and the country? For Govardhanram, the final union and duties towards the society can be attained only through what he describes as a philosophy of consumption. "Total sacrifice of the individual for the good of the whole is consumption... Complete dissolution and sacrifice of the self for others is consumption. It is through consumption that individual existence and life achieve completion."[8] Consumption for Govardhanram is an all encompassing philosophy and praxis. It is by leading a life of consumption that an individual offers his body/soul to the *Yajna* of the Great Force. "We must consume, both body and soul,... in the Great and Patent *Yajna* that is blazing around us, we throw as *Havis* (Oblation) the patent *Yajna* of body and soul... "[9]

The philosophy of consumption becomes the sole mediator between the individual and the Great Will and also the individual and the society. Through the philosophy of consumption, Govardhanram attempts to offer a critique of the vedantist philosophy, which was one of the earliest and most powerful influences on him. Vedanta, Govardhanram believes leads to asceticism as the mode of attaining salvation. "Patent is a thing to be avoided, and latent to be sought... as to the censures passed against the Patent, as to the exclusive acceptance of the Latent as Transcendental Idea."[10]

In 1877, at the age of twenty-two Govardhanram, in an essay entitled "Practical Asceticism in my sense of the word" offered a powerful critique of the practice of renunciation as a mode of attaining salvation. The care for the "self" is at the centre, he observes, in the practice of renunciation. Salvation cannot be attained through a

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self-centred mode. On the other hand it is a sense of duty and its performance which constitute one's Dharma, and it is this conception of *Dharma* which informed his vocation and defined his understanding of personal duty towards the country. But this sense of duty was conditioned by awareness of one's capabilities as "there is no duty beyond capacities." He was aware that it was not given to him to be a 'public' person – which he will be forced to be if he wanted to produce an event – he wanted to cultivate the *Saksibhav* of a *Sthitapragna*. "Glory, Public applause, Eminence, Moneys, Public Leadership, etc., are *Things I do not want at all*."[11]

He desired to achieve the state of *sthitapragna*, and his disinclination to produce an event should not lead us to conclude that Govardhanram is advocating either *nivritti* or a form of asceticism. Asceticism for him is an act of rebellion against the Great Will. The state of *sthitapragna* does not entail denial of duties. A *sthitapragna* is not a person who is dislocated from the world; on the contrary, he is a person who experiences deeply the world around him, but at the same time does not give himself to the rule of the senses. Govardhanram would say that all acts of a *sthitapragna* are acts of consumption. He describes this state of being as a state of Practical Asceticism. 4Neither the magnitude of the task nor such daunting realisations deviate him from his self-chosen path. "I must fancy", he says "that I am an *Ajaramar*, when planning my duty to my country."[12]

It was as a part of his duty towards the country that Govardhanram embarked upon a project which was to consume him for nearly fifteen years. In 1885, he started writing his novel *Sarasvatichandra*. When the final part was published in 1901, fourteen years had elapsed between the publication of the first and the last part. This book was spread over four parts and ran into over 1700 pages. He did not wish to write the novel at all. His initial plan was to write philosophical essays on the human condition. Upon reflection he found the essay form limiting. This limitation arose from the form, its restricted reach, and the inability of the general reading classes to appreciate and comprehend discursive prose. Given the limiting circumstances he came to the conclusion that illustrations of actual and ideal life is the most appropriate mode of communication. "The conviction has also grown upon him (author) that reality in flesh and blood under the guise of fiction can supply the ordinary reader with subtler moulds and finer casts for the formation of his inner self, than abstract discussions and that this is especially so with *a people who must be made, and not simply left, to read*."[13]

Govardhanram selected the novel form not for its aesthetic possibilities but for its potential as a medium of "moulding inner selves" of people. "Both women and the novel desire to be beautiful"; he says, "but fulfilment of this desire must be a means to achieve higher goals. Striving for mere aesthetic pleasure is not only undesirable but also harmful."[14] Keenly aware of the functions and possibilities of the novel, he felt disappointed that the possibilities of this form were not being utilised by the authors, that instead they used it as a medium to gratify the instincts of the reading classes. Functions of the novel, he says, are "much higher and sacred." An author who desires to use this form as a means of education must be aware of his audience. Govardhanram takes critical look at his readership and classifies them into three categories. In the first category are the scholars who read novels to acquire a deeper understanding of the human condition. The second class, comprise discerning readers who read the novel with a specific purpose of enriching their inner lives. And the third class is the general readership. This class reads novels either because it entertains them or gratifies some of their instincts. This is the class for Govardhanram that "must be made and not just left to read." Most novels address themselves to this class and there lies the reason for its popularity. According to him, the element of fiction or magic does not constitute the central concern of the novel. The function of the novel is to "educate" and "raise" the reading classes. The novel must show them the path of virtue. The characters and situations depicted in the novel assume centrality. Depiction of ideal types cannot inspire readers to aspire for a higher life. Nor can the depiction of evil alienate masses from it. Therefore, Govardhanram says that his novel will depict humane characters who are constantly striving to raise their condition.

With the progress of his enterprise we sense a satisfaction of accomplishment. "The purpose of the writer is to enable the reader to rise to a stage higher than where he was... *Sarasvatichandra*, thus undertaken at this point, *works* without doubt, and people *feel* the book. This is a mere literary work and will work on society."[15] A decade after the publication of the first volume, he notes with satisfaction that "the progress of the reading classes is equal to the aspirations of the writer to interest them in the principal problems of the day."[16]

The sense of achievement brought with it a sense of greater responsibilities for Govardhanram who was plagued by the fear of illness, and untimely death. "I think I owe it as a duty to the world that I should finish before dying."[17] India he felt was undergoing a strange transition in all spheres of community and personal life, "these forces have cast a gloomy shadow over our eyes." Henceforth, his objective will not only be to "raise"

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readers but "to help his countrymen in groping their way out of the darkness into some kind of light." [18] Govardhanram captures the predicament of his society – both the advocates of change and those who wish to give "eternal rigidity to the present" are uncertain as to how this transition will be harmonised. Will the process which is heterogeous in its inception result in an inward homogeneity? In this time of transition only one certainty exists, "Indian society must yield to the irresistible process of reciprocal assimilation."[19] Can this society find a repose? For Govardhanram, the realm of creative imagination can provide repose in such turbulent times as according to him, the "only place where we can safely look for a peaceful picture inspite of transient facts is in art and poetry."[20] Henceforth, he resolved that the purpose of the novel would be to work towards a vision of a harmonised future. The narrative which hitherto had been a blend of the actual and the ideal, enters a different phase as "the latter acquire a distinct predominance over the former." While dealing with the causes of the transition experienced by the Indian society Govardhanram refutes the widespread belief that India was witnessing a fusion of two different civilisations – The modern West and the East.

II

Sarasvatichandra is not "one" unitary text. The novel was not only published in four parts but was also written in four parts over a period of fifteen years. Each part has a distinct thematic content, has its own cast of characters and has different beginnings and ends. This is not to deny either the aesthetic unity or thematic unity of the novel. But the readings which privileged one story – the story of Kumud, Sarasvatichandra and Kusum – as the principal theme and consider all other themes as unnecessary diversions do not allow the appreciation of the complete text.

The increasing influence of the East India Company in the affairs of the "native states" provides the backdrop for the first part, subtitled *Buddhidhan no Karbhar*. It deals with the sustained efforts of Buddhidhan to assume complete control of the administration of a native state, Suvaranapur. Govardhanram describes the impoverished beginnings of Buddhidhan, his constant victimisation by Shathrai, the Prime Minister of the state and Buddhidhan's opportunistic alliance and friendship with Bhupsingh-a relative of the king and a claimant to the throne. Together they seek the support of the British Resident officer of a neighbouring area and with his intervention Bhupsingh is declared the legitimate ruler. With great patience Buddhidhan makes moves to secure the full confidence of the new ruler and to rid Shathrai's influence over the administration of the state. He triumphs and regains the post of the Prime Minister which his family had traditionally held.

The second part of the novel, *Gunsundarinu Kutambjal* deals with the state of a Hindu joint family in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century. Gunsundari and Vidyachatur were married as children. Vidyachatur was educated in Bombay and was appointed as a teacher in an English school at Ratnanagari. He also obtained the post of the teacher to the young prince, Maniraj of Ratnanagari. Gunsundari had acquired functional literacy, but as her name suggests she was endowed with virtues "natural" to women. Vidyachatur trained and educated his young wife enabling them to indulge in the pleasures of the mind and thereby avoiding the fate of many couples married in childhood. But just as they start experiencing "conjugality" driven by circumstances, Vidyachatur's relatives come to live with them as dependents. From being a young, joyous wife Gunsundari had to become a *grihini* and had to manage a household of thirteen to fourteen people, all with different needs and different personalities.

In this part Govardhanram achieves the height of his descriptive powers as a novelist. His minute descriptions of the dynamics of a joint family, his observation of human nature – its strengths and fragilities – his unencumbered prose and his characterisation make this part most endearing to readers. Govardhanram describes with a touch of humour – otherwise, so lacking in his prose – the interpersonal conflicts in the joint family, and pregnant Gunsundari's struggle to keep the family united and each member content. She and her father-in-law, Manchatur, together succeed in both reforming and rehabilitating all constituent units of the joint family, without breaking the "jointness" of the joint family.

The narrative this far is a blend of actual and ideal aspects of life. From the third part, the ideal acquires a distinctive predominance over the actual. The contrast between the first and the third part – which describes the state craft in another native state, Ratnanagari – is immediately recognisable.

The third part deals with the attempts of an enlightened ruler along with his feudal chiefs and dedicated advisors to create a responsible polity in times of general decay. Ratnanagari, because of the strength and vision of its rulers had survived the onslaught of British expansion. The state of Ratnanagari was governed by the concern for the welfare of all sections of society.

From state and society Govardhanram moves to *Dharma*. The fourth theme deals with the ideal community of Sundargiri. This community of ascetics leads their led

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their life in accordance with the principles of *Dharma*; in perfect harmony with nature and her creator; under the benevolent gaze of Vishnudas. Their strivings were the strivings of a soul wishing to achieve complete non-duality with the creator. The love story – the story of Kumud, Sarasvatichandra and Kusum – links Govardhanram's reflections on the state, society and *Dharma*. Kumud, the naturally virtuous daughter of Gunsundari and Vidyachatur was engaged at an early age to Sarasvatichandra. Born into great wealth, Sarasvatichandra – as his name suggests was a scholar and a shining star amongst the intellectuals of Bombay. Ascetic by nature and given to deep reflection about the state of his country, he was greatly enamoured by the natural charm and virtues of Kumud and they fall in love with each other before marriage. But his greedy step mother engineers a misunderstanding between the devoted son and the short sighted father which results in Sarasvatichandra disappearing from the house. In deep pain and agony, Sarasvatichandra renounces not only his family and his wealth but also Kumud. Kumud is disconsolate. He decides to live a life of an "Intellectual Vagabond" travelling to different parts of the country to experience the reality of his countrymen. As an unknown, rootless traveller with an assumed identity, and in desperate search for purpose and peace, Sarasvatichandra reaches Suvarnapur. There he is invited to be the guest of Buddhidhan who turns to him for advice. Kumud's parents by then had married their uncomplaining daughter to Pramaddhan, the unworthy and debauch son of Buddhidhan. Sarasvatichandra carrying the burden of his guilt once again leaves Kumud to her fate but not before Pramaddhan suspects the tenderness of their relationship. Before he can cause greater misery to Kumud Sarasvatichandra disappears and is given up as dead. Through a series of accidents Sarasvatichandra reaches Sundargiri, where he is celebrated as the heir to Vishnudas. Kumud, believed to be drowned in a river also reaches Sundargiri and lives in the care of *Sadhvis* as an ascetic. Here their feelings are discovered.

Widowed Kumud – though she is unaware of Pramod's death for long time – and Sarasvatichandra experience deep agony because of their mutual love. Vishnudas asks them to spend five nights together in a cave to contemplate their fate. They experience divine intervention and travel to the Land of the Enlightened in their dreams. Here they experience a union of their souls. They emerge from the cave, enlightened and pure, having conquered the promptings of their bodies by a superior desire – service of the country.

Sarasvatichandra, in his desire to atone for his sins proposes a marriage to widowed Kumud. But she declines. Kumud insists on Sarasvatichandra marrying her younger sister, Kusum. Sarasvatichandra is duty bound to obey Kumud's decision and the reluctant Kusum is also convinced about the desirability of this alliance. The novel ends with the inauguration of Sarasvatichandra's project for the regeneration of the country, and the suggestion of a new phase in the personal lives of Kusum and Sarasvatichandra.

III

Govardhanram's ambition was to create a generation of people "higher and stronger than they are" through the philosophy of consumption, in which the institutional structures of social organisation would play the pivotal role. Despite his own self perceived crucifixion in the family, his novel reflects a remarkable engagement with the institution of joint family.

Joint family, for Govardhanram, was not only an oppressive existential reality, with an average of fourteen people in the house throughout – but it was also an important social and cultural institution. As Sudhir Chandra has pointed out "both the existential and the normative aspects of the joint family feature in Govardhanram's dialogues with himself."[21] The *Scrap-Books* open with the statement on the angelic goodness of his wife Lalita and a severe criticism of the other members of his family, including the parents. So harsh was his criticism that he felt "frozen" while referring to those notes.[22] Tired of playing the role of an impartial judge and arbitrator, Govardhanram decided to formulate a "maxim in domestic management" and vowed to follow it. "While everybody is to have his or her liberties in my family; the liberties of no one are to go to the extent of clipping the necessary liberties and moral rights of other members, including even minors."[23]

Search for equanimity by formulating guiding principles does not provide any respite from the "conjugal jar." He is forced once again to examine the relative merits and peculiarities of character of the members of the family. Mother, he says, "is visited with short sighted littleness of mind,"[24] while the results of the "patriarchal cares" of father Madhavram "only result in hampering me and the whole family."[25] Their partiality for "Mrs. Brother" (wife of Govardharnram's brother Narhariram) disturbs Lalita, although she has – largely due to Govardhanram's training – "conquered her overwhelmingly uncontrolled temper."[26]

Govardhanram gives details of frictions within the family and ways in which he tried to resolve them. In an entry titled "Family misunderstandings and the way to remove them" he notes his attempts to be an impartial

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judge between his wife and mother, Shivkashi. He feels that an ideal situation would be one where they can resolve their conflicts without his mediation. This would require them to be "patient, enduring and forgiving." Govardhanram has no faith in the abilities of Lalita and Shivkashi given their lack of literacy to resolve their conflicts "intellectually." "Swallowing and explaining would both be impracticable between such illiterate people."[27] Instead, he allowed both mother and wife to complain to him in the absence of each other. Despite his maxim of allowing each member of the family his/her liberty he feels a compulsion to mediate in their inter-personal relationships, as "illiterate people are sure to tyrannise over each other if left to themselves."[28] The only way in which a joint family is steered away from becoming a joint-nuisance, lies for Govardhanram in the philosophy of consumption, in "ungrudging and all sided sacrifice."[29] Govardhanram was willing to even attempt that if it secured peace and harmony in the family. While matters pertaining to the partition of the family property were being discussed, he proposed that he shall retain nothing of the family property, but it was not accepted. The final arrangement of partition that was worked out came very close to his suggestion. He was aware that to a critic, his attitude would appear "Idiocy and spoilation." But this deliberate consumption fills him with supreme happiness. "I have begun my consumption *at home* – charity must begin at home. It fulfills my aspiration. . . to find myself so consumed into the atmosphere that surrounds me."[30]

With the partition of the family property, - though the property was partitioned they continued to live in the joint family – Govardhanram came closer to the idea of a nuclear family. The thought of the possibility of his sudden death and inability to provide for his wife and children in such an event fills his heart with gloom. "I am a houseless man, and my wife and children are houseless, and my parents think this is good."[31] Though he is able to overcome moments of gloom by his faith in the Great Will and the philosophy of consumption, Lalita's illness and the possibility of her death, makes him resolve once again not to sit in judgement on family matters. He shall henceforth "form judgement but be silent" and will give full play to the old principle. "I allow you your liberty and I shall have mine." He decided that he will henceforth allow them to settle their relationships in their own way and let them face the consequences of their follies. Henceforth "my only objects of care are now my children, neither wife, nor parents, nor brother. . ."[32]

Lalita's exclusion from the "objects of his care" is quite puzzling and unexplained. For quite sometime before this note was made, he was writing with some pride about her virtues and was to write after this observation with great sensitivity about her pain and suffering. With Lalita's illness Govardhanram's identification with his nuclear family became more crystallised. He absolves his conscience from traces of any guilt for having passed a judgement against his parents and others in the family. "My conscience decides in favour of myself."[33] For the first time in the *Scrap-Books* he is willing to commit himself against the joint family. "My lessons from all this, as a student of sociology, is conformation of my views against a joint family system. . ."[34] He feels that if the joint family system cannot be done away with completely, an attempt should be made to minimise the joint-ness of joint families. "When one son serves in Bombay, the other in Karachi, and the father's home is at Surat. This preserves the nature of the family as a joint insurance and minimizes the jointness in other respects."[35]

Lalita's suffering, her illness and the insensitivity of his family makes Govardhanram very bitter about the nature of patriarchal society. Writing about the status of a daughter-in-law in a joint family he wrote, "It is not the daughter-in-law's maturity but the mother-in-law's death that emancipates the former, probably when she is old, and after all her youthful yearnings and motherly sentiments have been smothered and even violated."[36]

A remark by his cousin-uncle Mansukhram that his opinions on the joint family were biased by his own existential experience and not really based on an impartial study of that institution, forces Govardhanram to re-evaluate his views on the joint family.[37] Having oscillated between the view on the one hand that joint family was a joint nuisance and on the other that joint family was a joint insurance, he suddenly turns to "the brightest side of the joint family." Joint family is *Protective*.[38] He draws the difference between the Western and Indian forms of social organisation. He called the former territorialism – "which spends its force in raising up individualism" – and the latter tribalism – which "revels in destroying Individualism."[39] Real strength of tribalism lies in its protectiveness. This system, he says, protects its members "whom it feeds and clothes and even saves from inclemency of all elements outside the hearth."[40] He compares the joint family to an insurance society by citing examples from his own family. At a larger level it was also a question between Western and Indian forms of social organisation. A system "so holy and so invulnerable" has provided "indestructible vitality," and protection to the "society and even the nation" even since the Aryans came to India. This system, he says, is under scathing attacks from territorial nations. Therefore one "should pause and think a thousand times" before attacking such an institution, which is a superior form of

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social organisation; which even fulfils and takes further, the aspirations of socialism. "It is *the* point which would solve many an inspiration of socialism."[41] As he remarked, "Joint Family. . . provides the fatherless with fathers, the motherless with mothers, sonless with sons and daughterless with daughters, paupers with maintenance, the homeless with homes, the sick with nurses. . . socialism never went the length of aspiring to so much."[42] Considering the situation of his own family he asks, "Could I have left them cold, myself enjoying the warmth of my means? No, not for the world, so long as I was myself – *a Hindu and not a European*."[43]

Having established the superiority of the Hindu (Indian) form of social organisation over the European form, he cautions those who are seeking radical reorganisation of society. They can "attempt modifications and reasonable development" even attempt partitioning in a particular family – like his own – but, "so far as the large society and the nation of family goes, offer no quackery of medicine to the ignorant masses that are protected by their own old, nature-selected, instinct moulded ways of living, except by slow and well-judged alteration."[44] In this enigmatic note of 25 April, 1894, Govardhanram began with a severe criticism of the patriarchal nature of the joint family and suddenly moved to the consideration of the "brightest side of the joint family." He is even willing to forget his deep discomfort with members of his family and says that all that suffering was not in vain. It appears that though the existential reality of his own family oppressed him, he accepted the "normative authority of the joint family."[45] The final impression left by this note is unmistakably in favour of the joint family. These, in no respect were his last words on the joint family. Despite his resolve not to "spoil" the books by references to the family, during the next twelve years of his life he did return again and again to the joint family.

Govardhanram grappled with the idea of the joint family with equal gravity in his novel, betraying his deep ambivalence about the institution of the joint family, ranging from total condemnation to romantic idealisation. These emotions are played out through two characters, Uddhatlal (as the name suggests his response is marked by impudence) and Chandrakant, a wise friend of Sarasvatichandra.[46] Uddhatlal adopts the radical, abolitionist, stance which Govardhanram had taken earlier, while Chandrakant provides an impassioned defense of the joint family, almost echoing the note of 25 April, 1894. During the debate they even lapse into English from Gujarati to emphasise their rhetoric. Uddhatlal's trenchant criticism of the joint family is anchored in the argument that tribal forms of social organisation – which is represented by the joint family – demand sacrifice of the individual aspiration. Furthermore, he argues that no fundamental social reconstruction is possible until the root of the problem – the joint family – is abolished. "Our joint family system has but a blasting influence on the growth of our individuals, on our economical and moral conditions, and even on our national and political growth. It has kept our beings stunted in intelligence and action... And for any reform, woe be unto every idea of your social or domestic reconstruction or even improvement so long as you have not touched the root of the disease and said: Down with the joint family;..."[47]

Chandrakant's reply to such severe criticism is more cautious. He argues that there is an element of truth in Uddhatlal's criticism but the picture that he paints is an incomplete one. In an almost poetic articulation of Govardhanram's views in the note of 25 April, 1894, he asserts that the European solution to the oppressive tendencies of the family – which results in aggressive individualism – is undesirable. He refers to the aspect of insurance that joint families provide, and at a larger national level he emphasises the need to preserve this ancient institution as it arouses feelings of patriotism. He articulates the familiar argument, that families have socialist aspirations and that the Hindu ideal is even superior to the Western ideology in so far as it aims to further it. "The Hindu ideal is eminently socialist in life and practice... The main feature of our Hindu socialism is that it is *Protective*. It protects the weak, the infants, the women, and the aged from starvation and its consequential crimes... It protects and protects."[48]

He also shows an awareness that the joint family system in its pure form cannot survive the aggressive onslaught of individualism. The responsibility of his generation will be to make necessary sacrifices to "secure a combination of the two boons, without their abuses."[49] This harmony, he argues cannot be achieved by aggressive, abolitionist stance. The harmonising process may take "atleast one generation" or even more and till then the present generation will have to live in "Poverty, patience, forbearance and even suffering."[50] Thus even Chandrakant's enthusiastic support of the joint family is tempered and qualified by ambivalence.

To a reader of the novel, this almost unexpected and sudden articulation of these two distinct positions on the joint family may appear unwarranted. This exchange becomes meaningful only when it is read along with the *Scrap-Books*. The distinct position of Uddhatlal and Chandrakant, when combined, show direct resemblance to the complex, ambivalent attitude of their creator Govardhanram. This was not the only time in the novel

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that Govardhanram revealed his ambivalent attitude on the joint family.

The second part of the novel which is titled *Gunsundarinu Kutumbjal*, is a larger and more subtler unfolding of Govardhanram's *Scrap-Books*. The central character of this part, Gunsundari was married to Vidyachatur when both of them were children. Vidyachatur had acquired formal education in Bombay, while Gunsundari as her name suggests, was "naturally" virtuous and wise. Vidyachatur had "trained" and educated her to enable her to partake his concern and appreciate the wisdom of the printed word. Govardhanram describes the circumstances in which more than fourteen members of Vidyachatur's family came to inhabit the house of Gunsundari and Vidyachatur. He creates a "typical" joint family which consisted Vidyachatur's parents – Manchatur and Dharmalaxmi, his debauched, unemployed brother, his wife, their four children and a daughter-in-law, a sister-in-law widowed in her childhood, a widowed sister and her son, and yet another sister and her daughter whose adventurous but foolish husband had run away from home as he could not honour his debts. Their coming together in Gunsundari and Vidyachatur's house not only placed a heavy burden on the economy of the household but also put a sudden end to the joyous celebration of their sensuous and intellectual "conjugal love." Henceforth, Gunsundari's only aspiration was to keep the family contented and united. As an embodiment of the philosophy of consumption she willingly made all sacrifices and deprived herself of all pleasures and desires. She brought together different individuals, with disparate needs and peculiar characters into a cohesive unit. In spite of her consumption, her efforts were neither appreciated nor recognised by others, preoccupied as they were in furthering their own, narrow self-interests.

Govardhanram describes with a touch of humour, the prevalence of anarchy in the family during the period of Gunsundari's confinement after the birth of her daughter, Kumud. During this period of confinement – Gunsundari, - like her creator Govardhanram – evaluated the characters of those who surrounded her. She was forced to confront the oppressive reality of the joint family. "Oh God! Teach me to remain afloat in this ocean. I used to think that many people staying together is a boon. This is not a boon, it is a curse. Each one has different desires, different peculiarities - each one with a different fault – and if, one cannot bear with it, all the blame is mine, irrespective of my love for them. I have to care for all their desires, no one to care for mine..."[51] Despite this indictment of the joint family, she is not willing to entertain the idea of absolving herself from her duties. It is the old patriarch, Manchatur, who in his empathy for his daughter-in-law, realised that until Gunsundari and Vidyachatur are relieved of the burden of the joint family, they will not be able to enjoy their youth, and the others will never learn to manage for themselves. With Gunsundari and Vidyachatur's help Manchatur relocates all the members. Their solution to the problem of the joint-family is what Govardhanram had suggested in his *Scrap-Books*; minimises the jointness of the joint family without destroying the joint insurance and protection it provides.

Though it may not be possible to attribute a final position to Govardhanram, it is possible to discern a dominant position. Govardhanram found the reality of his joint family oppressive and found people around him undeserving of his presence. This is quite evident from his chronic lamentations against his family which mark his *Scrap-Books*. Though he found it necessary to address the civilisational issue while discussing the joint family, his dissatisfaction with his own family, and the nuanced position he adopted in the novel are suggestive of the deep discomfort with the normative aspects of the joint family as well.

IV

Those who came of age in late nineteenth century India and felt concerned about the state of their society and nation, the fact of British presence in India was a fundamental awareness that they had to deal with. Awareness of subjection coupled with a profound uncertainty about the present and the future shaped their response to the British presence in India. Given this ultimate objective – "one which never ought to be lost sight of" – of moulding his people into a great people who would be able to take care of themselves, Govardhanram grappled with the meaning of British rule. In an entry in his diary, *Scrap-Book*, dated 13th April 1891 he wrote:

> India is invaded and subdued already. There is no question of Offensive or Defensive here, and Elasticity would be a nice helpmate in Constitutional Warfare. The rulers are a clever set of people – an admixture of selfish aggressors and disinterested, benevolent helpmates. India is worked by 'push and pull' among these, and naturally the Home Interest generally carry the day. Yet even here we win morsel by morsel, though often it is snatched away – sometimes even from near the lips.[52]

The only unambiguous, unqualified statement here is the fact of India's subjection. Accepting the British presence as given, Govardhanram advises his people to cultivate elasticity. "Coming after offense and defense have been ruled out, 'elasticity' becomes the very epitome of ambiguity. The term here seems to suggest

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pragmatism."[53] The relations between the rulers and the ruled are mediated by the idea of warfare. But this is not an offensive, nor a confrontation. The concept of "constitutional" – a concept given by the colonial rulers – and the need to cultivate elasticity, introduces an element of caution, of pragmatic moderation.

From there Govardhanram moves on to a depiction of rulers. They are "clever", "selfish aggressors", "disinterested" and yet "benevolent helpmates." Here again, Govardhanram displays ambiguous feelings and a mixed assessment of British presence. Yet he is aware that in the ultimate analysis the home interests carries the day and whatever ground is gained by Indians through their elasticity is suddenly snatched away.

Govardhanram might have been ambivalent towards the impact of British presence but he displays remarkable consistency in his analysis of "native states" and the capacity of his people to effectively counter the colonial aggressor. He has no faith in the ability of his countrymen to take premeditated action. They appear to him to be indulging in "well-meaning follies." He has some faith in the Congress because of its "well chosen leadership" of Hume and Wedderbun. "But in other matters our leaders are unfit. In view of these things, I would like to leave many things to our rulers rather than to our native leaders, for the former are atleast most sensible people. If natives act, I shall not hinder them. If Europeans act I shall have some confidence."[54] The high standards he had set for himself in private and public conduct may have made him sceptical of the abilities of his people. This severe denouncement and total lack of confidence in the abilities of his countrymen informed his vocation of creating a generation which shall be "better able to look and manage for themselves."

This negative assessment of his countrymen to manage the political and social implications of colonial encounter pervades all his reflections – whether in the *Scarp Books* or the novel. On the question of British presence, he did not allow any wishful thinking to colour his assessment. In a lengthy entry titled "India and the foreigner" he wrote: "India is under foreign control and the foreigner is the kindliest of all foreigners available. To get rid of the foreigner by force or fraud is an idea associated with all incidents that remind us of the rule being foreign. The idea naturally haunts our uneducated instincts; to the educated instincts the idea is both foolish and fallacious. It is foolish because it is not practicable, and because any experiment founded upon it would send the country from the frying pan into the fire. It is fallacious idea, because the distinction between a native and a foreigner is only transient, and the distinction is not a guarantee of a native being a better ruler than the foreigner in such a mass of heterogenous people as my country is."[55] He is not only emphasising his lack of faith in the strategies employed by Indians to get rid of the British but is questioning the basic premise of "foreign" and "native" interests being mutually exclusive. Moreover his absence of trust in the abilities of natives to manage heterogenous people with differing aspirations and needs also colours the assessment of the problem. He goes on to articulate the real problem: "(the) problem is not the absolute eviction of the foreigner, but *his accommodation to the native element*. . . where India and England *become one on Indian Soil*. . ."[56] One can assume that while cautioning against attempts to evict the foreigner completely from Indian soil Govardhanram is referring not just to the physical presence, but to a civilisational encounter, and his stand was informed by the awareness that Indian culture and society will be transformed by this "drama of transitition." The source of his anxiety lies in the uncertainty about the future and how these opposing tendencies will be harmonised and what kind of a resolution will emerge. To bring about a resolution where "England become one on Indian Soil" he required to "create a homogeneous nuclear class."

This also was the central concern of *Sarasvatichandra*. At the same time he was not unaware of the opposition between *foreign* and native interests. He elaborated in the same entry: "In India the sovereign is enlightened and yet has an interest foreign to the country. Two things have to be done. This interest has to be made to cease to be foreign; and while it is foreign, we want the natives that shall guard against the civic temptations to which the foreigner is exposed by his position, that shall enable the native interests to grow and develop during their minority without any hindrance from the adverse interests of the rulers, that shall infact watch over the real interests and develop the future welfare of the country. And it is possible to do this both loyally and patriotically."[57] In the four volumes of *Sarasvatichandra* he attempted to demonstrate this wisdom. The first part of the novel – which is the depiction of reality according to him – deals with the expanding British influence over the native states. It is one of the most severe indictment of native states in the literature of that period. He depicts a polity based on personal interests, plagued by widespread erosion of morals and values. The efforts of Buddhidhan and Bhupsingh to overthrow the corrupt administration of Shathrai were in the final analysis based on personal animosity and personal gain. "Buddhidhan had turned Bhupsingh and the entire administration into instruments of revenge for a deep animosity."[58] The only thing that differentiates Buddhidhan from Shathrai is the former's high sense of personal morality.

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Govardhanram also felt that the efforts made in the native states for the betterment of society were unlikely to bear fruit. In an entry in the *Scrap Books* he adds; "Besides, the greatest result available in this field can only be local influence – while the kind of influence that is wanted is one that could permeate and stimulate the whole constitution of India. This larger effect must be begun and produced in British India where the plant, if sown, can have a freer, larger growth along what Telang called the line of least resistance."[59] Indeed, he returned to this theme with regularity. Perturbed by his thoughts of retirement from active legal practice his family and friends tried to persuade him to take up tempting offers. A few days after the entry quoted above, he elaborated upon the "thorns of inferior society in Political life in Native States."[60] His chief objection to servicing in a native state that he would have to deal with people of inferior intellectual abilities. "No Prince can be equal to your education, and no fellow servant disposed to have your conscience in the present state of things." This situation he says is "not much dissimilar to the marriage of a man of my education and age with an illiterate girl of twelve, whom you must try to please and educate with all the arts of one attempting to make love with such an odd match."[61]

Govardhanram's other concern is about moral life in the native states. One may be forced to work with people who may not have any sense of duty, and even if they have it, it is likely to be "in a disfigured, mutilated, and even perverted form."[62] And therefore "I shall have to guard warily against the Fallacious Persuasions of the Serpentine Tempter, if ever he takes me near the Tree of Service." There is little doubt that Govardhanram's assessment of the native states is largely negative and he does not see much potential for "kindling the spark of organic flame" in such areas. Nevertheless, native states were a given reality and large areas of the country were under the administration of the native states.

It was imperative that he should turn his attention to these states in the novel. The third part of the novel – subtitled *Ratnanagari nu Rajyatantra* – deals with the creation of an "ideal" native state. From the third part onwards the narrative of the novel enters a different phase. Henceforth, normative considerations are given primacy over the depiction of reality. This part of the novel deals with the efforts of the state to maintain autonomy and introduce elements of oligarchic democracy in times of greater British domination. In a courageous portrayal of the events of 1857 he showed how the British presence was oppressive and at the same time how it created the space for a fundamental change in Indian society.

When the third part was published in 1898, there was "a strong rumour" in Ahmedabad that Govardhanram was arrested in Bombay "for writing sedition in this part of the novel." His wife, mother and sister spent two agonising days in Nadiad, till his telegram and letter reached them, quashing the speculation. This incident sparked off a reaction in him. "Was it a mistake to have written a book which has so disturbed the peace and happiness of my family? What is my duty? To boldly write such a book for my people or secure the peace of my family against such contingency? I find it impossible to solve the question. . ."[63] At that moment he might have been uncertain about the desirability of his enterprise, but such doubts did not plague him for long. "My book is not only loyal, but my innermost soul feels that it is written for and must tend to the welfare of both the rulers and the ruled."[64] The inclusion of the rulers is not surprising as for him the term "my people" include Englishmen "so far as the lot of my country is joined with or rests upon them."[65]

The third part also deals with the efforts of Maniraj – an embodiment of *Kshtratej*, and trained in western learning under the wise counsel of his former teacher and present *dewan* Vidyachatur – to create a polity based on the principles of consumption. Vidyachatur – after proper study of British administration and native states – had formulated a guiding principle for the polity. "If the administrators of the native states act with knowledge, intelligence, moral values and possess the will; they can contribute to the growth and welfare of their people to a level to which the subjects of British Indian cannot aspire to, even in their dreams."[66] The efforts of the entire administration were geared towards the realisation of this vision. Vidyachatur's private and public conduct was also reminiscent of Govardhanram's reflections in his *Scrap-Books* on the role of an ideal minister. While discussing, what to his mind, were the short comings of the *dewan* of Baroda, Govardhanram elaborated the role of a minister. The chief short coming of the *dewan* according to him was that, "he lost sight of the fact that his master was his master, and not his child or subordinate." He went to describe the right conduct, "I think the ministers are bound to lead Princes by sweet arts and obedient power, to manage them as clever wives manage husbands and nurses manage patients, and to work upon their souls by inspiration of love, awe, reverence, spirit of friendship, regard for ability and experience, and shrewdness and sagacity, and confidence in motives."[67] Govardhanram felt that most ministers, given their superior intelligence and ability, tend to consider themselves the fountainhead of all power and welfare and "ignore, or even forget, that the well-being of the state *does* consist in allowing the

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last energy of power to retain its vested seat in the brain that wears the crown. . ."[68] Such patient and ever watchful caution was embodied in the *dewan* of Bhavnagar's Samaldas Parmananddas, on whose personality the character of Vidyachatur is believed to be based.

In spite of having created an ideal native state, Govardhanram remained suspicious of desirability and efficacy of action taken in the native states. He gave release to his conflicting emotions through a dialogue between the residents of British India and the administrators of Ratnanagari.[69] Virrao, a touring intellectual from Mumbai takes an arrogant abolitionist stand. According to him "all is rotten to the core" in the native states. Their corrupt and decadent influence has spread to other areas and is preventing their growth, destroying their morals and polity, "damn your states and politics for preventing all dictates of truth."[70] No amount of remedial measures, he observes, will be able to save these states from certain doom. The states should be allowed to destroy themselves, "They are doomed and shall cease and the sooner the better." Against this Chandrakant takes a more cautious stance. One thing he believes is certain, change is inevitable. The local states have already been reduced to "Local Governing Agencies." Their authority will ultimately be totally subjected to the British administration. Echoing Govardhanram's desire for a homogenised group to mediate the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, he says that the rulers and administrators of the native states should form such enlightened aristocracy. Shankarsharma, an official in the administration of Ratnanagari, provides an impassioned defense of the native state. Like others he also lapses into English. "The maturity of our own moral and intellectual attitude, whenever we reach it in distant future, will not fail to command respect and love in the brightest circles among Englishmen, if English instincts will have survived that period."[71] After this optimistic vision, he articulates the impulse which defines the administration of Ratnanagari. He continues, "The Princes that will have then led their subjects to a climax of genuine prosperity, a vision of which a foreign Government will have tried in vain to conjure up before their own Indian subjects, will present a divine spectacle which will make your English Rulers blush with an awakened consciousness of their own inner frailties!"[72] Trying to close this endless debate, Vidyachatur feels that in these ambiguous times only one thing is certain. We are witnessing a strange transition, he says, where only certainty is change. The society will not be able to go back entirely to what it was. Those who are oblivious to these changes will be left behind in the dark legions. From these conversations and Govardhanram's own reflections, it is not difficult of discern the voice of Govardhanram.

Govardhanram was ready to accept the reality of the native states at a larger political level but in his personal life he remained sceptical of either their desirability or normative superiority over the British rule. Notwithstanding his three year long stay in Bhavnagar, he refused in the latter part of life to be drawn in or lured by money and power, and refrained from accepting any position in a native state.

V

Sarasvatichandra left his parental home, renounced his wealth and broke his engagement with Kumud mainly because he wished to travel around the country to understand and experience the social conditions. He hoped that this understanding would enable him to gain a much clearer vision of the regeneration of his country. Towards the end of his travel, on his last repose on *Chirungivshrung* he outlined his vision to Kumud. As he had renounced his wealth, he did not posses enough resources to carry out the project in its entirety and hence, initially he outlined a part of his vision. Sarasvatichandra had inherited about four lakhs of rupees from his mother, which over the years had grown to about six-seven lakhs. He hoped to carry out the initial phase of the project utilising the interest from this amount. Sarasvatichandra felt that the material wealth of the country was being drained and more importantly people appeared to be losing the art of creating wealth. Moreover, he felt that if people were unable to live by norms, within limits prescribed by *Dharma* in a situation of poverty, it would prove disastrous for the entire society.

The first part of the project concerned itself with material regeneration of the country, it certainly had a social component built into it. Sarasvatichandra, decided to select one person from among those who had passed their B.A. examination and had shown marked aptitude for commerce and industry and had entrepreneurial ability. This selected individual was to be placed as a trainee/apprentice for two years with successful traders and businessman. During this period of training the selected person would be paid a monthly salary of Rs.30/-. After successful completion of this phase, the trainee would be sent for a period of three years to America or Europe to learn the commercial practices and trends of the West. After three years the person would be sent to any other part of the world for one year. During this stay abroad he would be given a salary which would not exceed the interest earnings on a capital of Rs.40,000/-. After his exposure abroad the trainee would again spend

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two years in India refining his skills and knowledge. After this extensive training of almost eight years, Sarasvatichandra hoped that the "learned entrepreneur" will not seek fulfillment of narrow personal ambitions and desires, nor will he amass wealth by unfair means or by exploiting the under privileged. He will conduct himself according to the norms appropriate for his time – *Yugdharma* – and will strive for the betterment of the entire society. Given the limited resources, the project will be able to fund only one person every two years. Thus in a period of twelve years, Sarasvatichandra hoped to create at least six "learned entrepreneurs" for the material regeneration of the country.

If the material regeneration was one issue facing the country, the weakening strength of the country, and the weakening strength of the younger generation was another issue. Sarasvatichandra believed that the younger generation not only provide support to the old and the very young, they act as a link between the past and the present. Societal well-being is anchored in its knowledge and for knowledge to flourish the well-being of the younger generation is essential. Hence, they resolved to undertake a pilgrimage to different parts of the country every alternate year to understand the conditions of the younger generation. By experiencing their reality, their hopes, aspirations, problems and failings they hoped to nurture and shape a generation of people who will be better able to look after themselves. Women play an anchoring role in the organisation of family and society, they felt. Kumud would work with women, help bring new knowledge, different social trends in the domestic sphere in order to transform it. Eventually, they hoped, women would come out and will be allowed to come out of the domestic space to participate in the project for social regeneration. This was the more practical plan according to Sarasvatichandra. He had a larger dream which he had outlined for Kumud.

Sarasvatichandra believed that the country was passing through a "drama of transition." What was required was a group of people who would act as a link between opposing tendencies. A group of people who would have "Knowledge" about the traditions of the past, new trends in society and also knowledge about forces which are bringing about fundamental changes in all spheres. This community, he believed, had to provide a vision for the future and act to realise it. It will have to contain opposing tendencies and harmonise them in the future formations. This community will not only have to address social and civilisational issues but will have to act to bring about economic and material regeneration of the country. Sarasvatichandra's project was to create this community. He called this community *Kalyangram*.The self-sufficient, autonomous community and facilities of *Kalyangram* were designed to act as a permanent retreat for those who wished to engage with the idea of regeneration. While describing the outline Sarasvatichandra displays the same obsessive concern for clarity and attention to minute details as his creator Govardhanram.

The core community of *Kalyangram* will comprise three groups:

a) Modern intellectuals who had successfully passed the highest examination of the newly introduced English education.
b) Traditional scholars
c) Accomplished artists, craft persons and artisans.

On the basis of a careful selection process, individuals will be invited to be a part of the community. This community was for those people who had the ability to carry out independent and autonomous pursuits, and not for students who would require constant guidance and supervision.

The Central preoccupation of the scholars and intellectuals would be to understand those traditions, beliefs and knowledge systems in which the communities of the past were anchored. They would also study the forces of change. Western and especially British ideals of society, culture and economy would form an integral part of their study. The inhabitants of the community would undertake regular study tours and travels to understand the emerging social conditions. Their study in libraries and laboratories, combined with an understanding derived from experiencing reality, these scholars it was hoped, would be able to provide a vision for the future. Their concern, Sarasvatichandra emphasised, ought not to be with debates of ideological or theological nature, but with the quest for Truth. The crafts persons and artisans would study the ancient art and craft traditions. Combining their understanding of new technologies, they would attempt to rejuvenate the withering traditions and practices. The earlier outlined plan for economic regeneration would also form an integral part of this community's endeavours.

The permanent residents of this community would be provided with all necessities of life. *Viharbhavan* would house married couples and their children, *Kumarbhavan*, unmarried men, and *Stribhavan*, widows and, when social conditions permitted, unmarried "sisters of mercy." There would be appropriate medical facilities and schools for the children of permanent residents. Living quarters

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would also be provided to the visiting parents and relatives of the members of the community for a limited period.

The community would also invite eminent thinkers, authors, journalists, editors and businessmen to interact with the residents. The community would also have places of workshop of all faiths where believers and theologians would interact among themselves and the members of the community. The administration of *Kalyangram*, over and above meeting the living expense of all residents, would give a monthly honorarium of Rs. 10 to Rs. 50/-. Depending upon the review of their performance and contribution, their honorarium would be increased, once after three years and once after ten years.

The self-sufficient community, Sarasvatichandra hoped would be able to create a base for a harmonious future.

VI

The histriography of social reform in modern India is familiar with the primacy given to the question of widow remarriage. It is also familiar with the dichotomy between belief and action which casts a shadow on these efforts. The attempt here is neither to give a history of social reform nor to understand the reasons for tensions within the structures of belief. The focus here is on Govardhanram's response to the question of widow remarriage. The scale and depth at which he "dealt with the question of widow remarriage remained unparalleled in Nineteenth century Indian literature."[73]

The novel appeared to be moving towards an end where marriage between widowed Kumud and Sarasvatichandra did not appear implausible. It culminated in the marriage between Sarasvatichandra and Kusum, the younger sister of Kumud. This sudden denouement has perplexed many commentators of *Sarasvatichandra*. Despite the definitive resolution presented in the novel the love between Kumud and Sarasvatichandra is closely examined through various characters, each bringing forth their desired resolution. To understand the logic of this final resolution it is necessary to follow the thought processes of Kumud, Sarasvatichandra, Chandrakant and Kumud's father Vidyachatur. From their conversations and from the *Scarp-Books* we need to discern the voice of Govardhanram. Though, Kumud and Sarasvatichandra appear to be in total control of their passions and desires, they do enter into a spiritual marriage in their dream stage. At the conscious level, Sarasvatichandra operates from a position of overwhelming guilt. Holding himself responsible for Kumud's trials and present misery he is consumed by a sense of sin and seeks atonement. For him atonement lies in publicly accepting Kumud as a wife. This he feels is his d*harma* and his dreams and desires of regeneration of his society must be conditional upon the performance of *dharma*. His s*vadharma* compels him to propose marriage to Kumud. Kumud responds to this from a different notion of d*harma*. Kumud is governed by ideals of pure love. Her fulfillment and meaning is now to be sought in the achievement of Sarasvatichandra's project of regeneration. At the same time she cannot also conceive disruption of her spiritual union with Sarasvatichandra. Kumud is keenly aware that Sarasvatichandra and his project require a companion – wife. At the same time, the society remains hostile to the idea of a widow's remarriage. If they were to marry, Sarasvatichandra will be excommunicated and his dreams of mediating the societal forces to shape the destiny of his country will remain incomplete, as effective intervention will not be possible from outside the boundaries of society. The only real option open to Kumud was to continue as an ascetic but remain enjoined spiritually to Sarasvatichandra and his project. They cannot find a way out of their predicament and decide to be guided by Chandrakant's opinion.

Chandrakant posits three possible choices before them. If they decide to get married, he opines that, they will have to give up their dreams of social regeneration. As a witness of their spiritual love he cannot advise them to lead separate lives. Kumud's idea of spiritual union does not seem feasible to him. He believes that the society will not and cannot differentiate between *sukshma* and *sthula*, especially in case of man-woman relationship. He articulates the most desired option which he feels will meet with least resistance from the family and society. Kumud and Sarasvatichandra should continue their spiritual union, Kusum and Sarasvatichandra should get married. In this way, Kusum's desire to remain unmarried can also be fulfilled, though differently. Kusum and Sarasvatichandra can marry for the benefit of the society and not indulge in physical relationship. Sarasvatichandra's project will also benefit by two able and dedicated companions. Sarasvatichandra is not even willing to abide by such "fictions." He cannot allow pragmatic considerations to dictate over his *dharma*. "Duty first and then only our most cherished dreams,"[74] he says and Chandrakant is forced to bow to his decision. All three of them decide to leave the final decision to Kumud.

The other significant thought process is that of Vidyachatur. He is uncertain about the fate of his daughter. The possibility of her being alive saddens his

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heart, as she will be condemned to conventional widowhood. This thought is insufferable but he must think of Kumud's future. He asks himself, not insignificantly in English, "But as a practical man can I not see my remedy for a disease which threatens to be a fact?", and he offers an answer, "Other nations have it – mine bars it."[75]

The refusal of his nation and society to offer a remedy for this problem does not prevent further pontification. He continues in English: "Conventional widowhood! Social Terrorism! Must you stand between me and my love and duty to my dear child? Here is a calamity; here is escape from it – And yet the poor one must suffer and not escape! and why? Because the stronger sex controls her lot. Is it proper in a father to submit to the control and see the child withering before his eyes, because he is a social-moral-coward?"[76] At this moment the only solace he is able to derive is from his faith in Sarasvatichandra. Since Sarasvatichandra had courage to spurn so much wealth, still nursing the image of Kumud he may show the audacity of accepting widowed Kumud as wife. He has faith in the courage of Sarasvatichandra but lacked confidence in his own abilities to make moral choices. The personal and social price of this subversive insanity appeared to be too high. His old father and uncle are unlikely to be hospitable to such an idea. Gunsundari might agree, but only because it is *his* desire. The social uproar and resulting marginalisation will make him unfit for *dewanship*. Despite the dangers entailed in his thought of widow remarriage he was unable to brush aside the idea. The awareness of having committed a "Great Sin" by marrying her to an undeserving person without waiting for the person she loved, takes possession of him. His moment of truth arrives when they receive definitive news about Kumud. Kumud and Sarasvatichandra are both alive and together on Sundargiri. His mind is filled with apprehension, joy, sorrow and fear, for if the news of their cohabitation were to spread, the social opprobrium would consign him and his family to the margins. He still does not lose faith in the goodness of his daughter and Sarasvatichandra. He draws solace from the fact that Vishnudas will not have allowed *adharmik* practices in his *ashram*.

After a painful dialogue with himself and Gunsundari, Vidyachatur arrives at a notion of his *svadharma*. He makes a distinction which was crucial to the debates on social reform at that time. He stresses that widow remarriage is opposed only by *Lokachar* – popular custom – and not *Dharma*. Hence, he will not even resort to the stratagem suggested by his father to marry Kumud and Sarasvatichandra secretly to ward off a social uproar.

Finally he is ready to own the burden of his deeds. He confesses that by submitting to *Lokachar* masquerding as *Dharma*, he had destroyed Kumud's liberty and pushed her into a sea of sorrows. His atonement lies in subjecting all other notions of *Dharma* to his *Dharma* towards the daughter. He makes a resolve to take the "right" action and allow both daughters the liberty to decide their own future. If Kumud and Sarasvatichandra wish to marry, he decides, he will actively support their desire. As this is not only *Dharma* but "in civilized countries it is also the ultimate test of parental love." He and his family will pay the price of such an action. Kusum will also be free to exercise her free will; if she decides to remain unmarried she will not be forced to be otherwise.

The final resolution proposed by Kumud – marriage of Kusum and Sarasvatichandra and an ascetic life for herself – and accepted by all comes as a surprise. Sudhir Chandra has observed that in this "*Sarasvatichandra* reflects the contemporary ambivalence with regard to the desirability of widow remarriage."[77] While the novel depicts a poignant portrayal of the human condition and the dilemma posed by the idea of widow-remarriage, this final resolution renders the powerful portrayal somewhat ineffective. One can assume that the final choice was dictated neither by aesthetic considerations nor by faith in the validity of social practice. The answer must lie in Govardhanram's eithico-moral universe. Reacting to the death of a relative's wife he writes in an entry dated 27th February, 1906,[77] "of course a new substitute will be sought for one that is gone. When a husband dies, the widow cannot get a similar relief." From this anguished personal response to an unjust social practice the tone undergoes a subtle shift in the following lines. "Our reformers complain of this unjustice to her. The complaint is as right and the sympathy for her as well deserved as the custom against her is successful in keeping her down." In these lines his displeasure against the system is clear but at the same time from a personal response he moves to a general, societal plane. The reader is surprised at the rationalisation that is sought in the next lines. The entry continues "But this is not a mere question of right vs. might. The custom is based upon Joint Family Exigencies, and the Castes and have not it admit divorce too on easier terms than law can afford. New circumstances will probably bring out some happier compromise. In the meanwhile, orthodoxy, with nature's gift of self-preserving instincts, must hold its own as an iron wall, and reformers grow wiser and less sorrowful in their frequent knocking of heads against the wall, until the wall begins to crumble and the heads grow stronger by frequent exercise in knocking and breaking; and a new scheme of reciprocal adaptation between Family, caste and justice sparks out of the friction. But I won't lecture

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here." His feelings for the victim of social practice appears to be genuine but concern for social equilibrium does not allow him to fully empathise with the victim and denounce an unjust system. He moves from the emotive to the discursive. A similar kind of ambivalence is evident in his attitude to the joint family. A similar attitude informs *Lilavati Jivankala*.[78] Noting Lilavati's support to the reformist call of banning child-marriage but her opposition to the demand for widow remarriage, Govardhanram informs us that Lilavati's attitude embodies the dilemma of Vidyachatur and Gunsundari at one level and voice the reasoned opinions of many social reformers at another level. Govardhanram goes on to add that Vidyachatur's desire for, and support to Kumud's marriage to Sarasvatichandra even at the cost of *dewanship* was a just and moral desire. At the same time Gunsundari's opposition to it was equally just in so far as she understood the "moral strength and purity of womanhood." Once again he desists from expressing his personal stand. He moves on to the enunciation of the social reform movement. He articulated the perspective of those social reformers who had been advocating caution in case of widow remarriage. He says that his group wishes to remain neutral in this debate. It is not that they are unmoved by the plight of the victims of widowhood, but their neutrality arises from two factors: By obstructing widow remarriage they are not performing their duties to the widows, and by sanctioning it, they also fear the consequences of widespread prevalence of widow remarriages. The fears, he says, were articulated by Prof. Bhandarkar who believed that, (a) the good of the nation and society is not entailed in the happiness of a few widows and (b) there are already existing mechanisms of man-woman sensual relationships. By creating one more avenue for amorous liaisons, the moral fabric of civilised conduct will be threatened. In this intervention also he is at pains to distance himself from any position.

We are given one more opportunity to discern his position on the final resolution of the dilemma. During 1906 Dayaram Gidumal, a Sindhi social reformer and at that time District Judge of Surat entered into a dialogue with Govardhanram.[79] Dayaram endorsed Govardhanram's decision of not marrying widowed Kumud to Sarasvatichandra. But he had several objections to the manner in which Govardhanram had brought about the resolution of the intertwined fates of Kumud, Kusum and Sarasvatichandra. He believed the Govardhanram had been wrong in marrying Sarasvatichandra to Kusum, whose desire was to remain unmarried. His principal objections to this arrangement were three:

(a) Kusum would eventually regret her choice and as a consequence she, Kumud, Sarasvatichandra and her parents would be unhappy;
(b) Sarasvatichandra's marriage to Kusum was in no way a necessary precondition to the success of *Kalyangram*. Kumud, leading the life of an ascetic and Kusum as a 'Sister of Mercy' could have contributed to this project by working for the upliftment of women;
(c) and finally, that Govardhanram had been very cruel to his hero, as he had already enjoined his heart and soul to Kumud. It is highly unlikely, Dayaram argued, that he can remain faithful to both the sisters and remain true to himself.[80]

Govardhanram's initial response to this criticism was weak and superficial. He argued that a ground for such a resolution was already prepared in the previous sections of the novel, where Kusum is shown to be fascinated by Sarasvatichandra. Kusum's unconscious fascination was not physical, it was spiritual. She was attracted to the high ideals of his hero. Govardhanram further argued that this resolution was proposed by Kumud and had the sanction of both families and the *sadhvis* of Sundargiri.

Govardhanram's weak defense did not satisfy Dayaram. Responding to his letter immediately, Dayaram persisted in his criticism and re-emphasised his opinion that Govardhanram's decision was cruel. Govardhanram responded to this charge at various levels. He argued that this resolution did not go against Kumud's notion of ideal love, nor against Sarasvatichandra's sense of duty. Kumud's arguments had convinced Kusum and she was willing participant in the union. He further argued that he had intended to subject Sarasvatichandra and Kumud to various tests and trials in 1885 when he had begun writing the novel. Kumud and Sarasvatichandra's love for each other was not anchored in the desire of the body but in the desire of their souls. During their stay in the cave they had successfully crushed all the desires of the body and their soul had emerged victorious. They had even negated the pleasure of touch which they experienced during their moments of unconscious weakness. Anticipating the charge that this can happen only in an ideal world, Govardhanram reminded Dayaram that this hero and heroine were in the midst of a divine presence during their stay in the cave. Govardhanram agreed that this arrangement militates against the laws of nature. But he nevertheless, defends his position on a civilisational ground. He argued that the essence of Hinduism consists in militating against what worldly beings consider as natural. He draws Dayaram's attention to the present predicament of his country, where educated Indians were

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vacillating between what was considered as natural and given, and the new rebellions. Moreover, Hindus have always considered d*harma* superior to the animal instincts of human beings.

Govardhanram felt that the present social condition was inhospitable to unmarried women. This denied to Kusum the possibility of becoming a "Sister of Mercy." He reminded Dayaram the fate of Pandita Ramabai who was excommunicated by her society. He did not want such a fate for Kusum. Govardhanram invoked his personal notions of "Duties towards the country." He said that from the beginning he intended that his characters would act as guiding angels to their countrymen and expressed his confidence that his hopes will bear fruit. Despite holding on to his position Govardhanram finally confessed that his *real* need was to find a companion – wife for Sarasvatichandra and his project. Kumud's social condition made her unsuitable for this. And there was not one more appropriate than Kumud's sister, considering her intelligence and superior natural virtues.[81] Despite his confession Dayaram remained unconvinced.[82] He argued that such a resolution can be defended from the point of *Parmarthik Satya* but will not stand the test of either *Vyaharik Satya* or ideal love. He argued that Sita would never married Ravana even if the Gods and Rama himself had tried to convince her. Govardhanram agreed to both the arguments. But insisted that *Parmarthik Satya* negates the presence of love and his hero was a love-less being. Not willing to engage in further debate, he attributed the choice to "the mood of hour," which made him "conduct consciously and right or wrong there it stands."[83]

Dayaram closed the debate but not before issuing the final indictment. "...I only hope the children of your imagination won't blame for your mood of the moment, when you meet them in the ideal world."[84]

Given Govardhanram's obsession with the philosophy of consumption, with its emphasis of negating the self for higher goals, the subjugation of the idea of widow remarriage at a philosophical level is not surprising. Even less surprising is the subordination of the possibility of remarriage to the twin ideals of ascetic renunciation and spiritual union. His ethico-moral universe had space for relativisation of d*harma*, of subjecting a minor duty to a higher ideal – but it had no space for pragmatic – practical considerations. His confession that his *real* need was to find a suitable companion – wife for Sarasvatichandra and his project, and his admission that widowed Kumud was not suitable for this, coupled with his final resort to the "mood of the hour" are informed by practical, pragmatic considerations. He resorts to the realm of the practical, without any feeling of moral anxiety or moral anger. This admission is difficult to explain.

Is it possible to conclude like one perceptive observer has, that Govardhanram, in the final analysis is for widow remarriage and he is proposing only a "temporary deferment" of that process?[85] It is true that Govardhanram displayed similar tendencies on the question of joint family. The imperatives of social equilibrium forced him to reconsider his existential experience. But, he remained sceptical of the normative superiority of the institution of joint family.

His ambivalence on the question of widow remarriage is of a different kind. His attack on the institution of joint family was rooted in a personal sense of victimhood. He considered himself, Lilavati and to some extent Lalita "martyrs to the cause of joint family." In the case of widow remarriage he is able to distance his existential experience and larger societal issues. His not so subtle shift in the note of 27 February 1906 from personal to discursive, can perhaps be explained by this. Moreover, on the issue of joint family it is easy to discern a dominant position and ascribe it to Govardhanram. In the case of widow re-marriage it is not so easy. In the novel, the *Scrap-Books* and *Lilavati Jivankala* Govardhanram does give play to different view points. But, at the same time, he makes painfully contrived attempts to disguise his own voice. This makes one suspect his support to the cause of widow re-marriage. This suspicion is not without basis. One can – without the danger of over interpretation – ascribe a position to Govardhanram. He did feel – like Prof. Bhandarkar and many others-that the good of the nation was not entailed in the cause of a few widows. And that a society can afford to wait "until the wall begins to crumble and heads grow stronger... and a new scheme of reciprocal adaptation between Family, Caste and justice sparks out of the Friction." This statement is suggestive of his unwillingness to make any intervention in the societal forces shaping the destiny of his country. This hesitation negates the core values which informed his moral universe and his project of shaping a generation of people higher and stronger than they are. This crippling hesitation, coupled with his attempts to relativise *dharma* and his sudden introduction of purely pragmatic considerations, without any moral rage, do not allow us to conclude that "he is for widow remarriage" and is proposing "only a temporary deferment" of that desired objective.

VII

Govardhanram is reported to have observed that the vocation of a writer is to expand the human nature by placing before the people "purer and higher ideals of

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social life" in a "beautiful and ennobling" manner. He sought to achieve this through *Sarasvatichandra*. His idea of influencing contemporary society was fulfilled, perhaps beyond his expectations. "The educated youth of Gujarat lived in the dreamland of Sarasvatichandra, Kumud and Kusum... No other book of fiction has made so powerful an impact on its contemporaries as *Sarasvatichandra* has made."[86] For over hundred years *Sarasvatichandra* has remained the canonical text of Gujarati literature, perhaps no other work of fiction has been able to match its range of concern or popularity. "No other event, before the arrival of Gandhi, had so captured the imagination of the society and had succeeded in moulding the minds of the people on the path of the moral – civilised conduct as this epic novel."[87]

Govardhanram's attempt was to create a new moral universe for the emerging middle class. As mediators of colonial cultural encounter, this emerging class experienced deep uncertainties about the old order and felt ambivalent insecurities about new modes of thoughts, conducts and cultural ideals creating permanent disjunctions in their public and personal lives. Largely due to industrialisation, distance between the public and domestic spheres increased as men came in contact with new ideas and ideologies. This group was in search for new models of thought and conduct which would provide some sense of permanency in times and transition. Govardhanram provided them with a new ideal through his "graduate hero."[88] This graduate hero has become a dominant thematic category for Gujarat Literature. This acute awareness of having to provide anchors introduced caution in Govardhanram's enterprise. He is willing to question the assumptions and normative principles underlying social and political institutions, he is also willing to reject their moral superiority in some cases. Nevertheless, he does not consider it desirable to posit options which might fundamentally alter the old and introduce new anxieties. This caution is quite evident in his attitudes towards widow remarriage.

This overwhelming desire to provide anchors to society led him to the creation of a new idealised woman – The Domestic Angel.[89] Govardhanram's personal life and the novel reflect a remarkable engagement with women and femininity. For a major part of his life he tried to "educate" and "raise" the virtues of his wife, Lalita. So complete and intense was his identification with his daughter Lilavati that he neglected his only male child Ramaniyaram. The novel *Sarasvatichandra* is anchored in the characters of women that he created – Gunsundari, Kumud and Kusum. What could be the reason for his intense encounter with womanhood?

For Govardhanram tradition was to be "the bedrock of social reconstruction through much of this transitional phase, when two civilisations confronted each other."[90] In times of transition women and womanhood became ideal embodiments of traditional virtues. Govardhanram introduced to Gujarat the Victorian ideal of "naturally virtuous woman." Govardhanram established the moral and cultural superiority of women over men. Colonial cultural consciousness, had for many, deep insecurities regarding their own traditions. In Govardhanram's moral vision, it was through women that harmony and virtue, in both family and society were sought to be achieved. In such times women became the sites where the conflict between tradition and modernity was being played out. Govardhanram's philosophy of consumption also place additional burden over women. Consumption with its emphasis on continuous self denial, without an accompanying sense of sacrifice, and valorisation of pain as an ideal to be sought to further one's consumption, crushed womanhood. Govardhanram sought to create such an ideal woman in his life, as well as in his fiction. When his "domestic angel" – Lalita – became hysterical under his regimentation and gathered courage to question his ideals he made another attempt through Lilavati. Little did he realise that it is impossible to create one ideal woman through two lives.

Govardhanram's vision demanded and got heavy sacrifices from women. Lalita paid it through her hysteria, Gunsundari through her consumption, Kumud by submitting her desires to a higher ideal of ascetic renunciation and Lilavati through her life. Govardhanram's vision was essentially a patriarchal vision, which by valorising "natural" qualities of women induced them to martyr themselves.

One final question must be asked. What was the reason for the loss of Govardhanram's creative self? Govardhanram's creative self was anchored in his project of mediating civilisational processes shaping the future of his people. From the initial thought of writing discursive essays, to its culmination in a novel of epic proportions, it was this overwhelming need for mediation that kept alive his creativity. His creative impulse was tempered and guided by the frame-work of the philosophy of consumption. His real project was to create a society and people informed by principles of consumption. This framework enabled him to deal with his own martyrdom in the joint-family. With its help Govardhanram could philosophically subordinate Lalita's illness and rebellion. He could even explain away Kumud's "choice". But Lilavati's death brought forth the destructive potential of his philosophy and his project.

The loss of Lilavati was permanent. He could neither

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reconcile himself to her death nor explain it away philosophically as a will of the Great Force. Despite his utterances about drawing solace and strength from his philosophy, one suspects that a part of his self developed a deep, fundamental mistrust about his philosophy. This loss of faith was fundamental. He did not possess either the courage or the energy to disown a philosophy which constituted the core of his self-identity. He was condemned to live with a self which was destructive. But his creative self was deeply aware and tormented by the destructive self. The creative self could not allow for another vision, another fiction. The loss of creativity, one suspects, was linked to the loss of faith.

Notes

1. K. C. Pandya, R. P. Bakshi and S. J. Pandya (eds.), *Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi's Scrap-Book* (Bombay: N. M. Tripathi, 1959), pp. 29-30, emphasis in the original.
   The *Scrap-Book* for the period 1894-1904, edited by the same editors appeared in 1959. The *Scrap-Book* for the period 1904-6, edited by K. C. Pandya alone was published earlier in 1957. Hereafter these volumes will be referred to as *Scrap-Book* I, II and III respectively. Although the chronology of publication goes against this arrangement, this has been done for the convenience of citation as well as to maintain the chronology of their writing.
2. Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi, *Sarasvatichandra*, four parts, part 1 published in 1887, part 2 in 1893, part 3 in 1897, part 4 in 1901. 18th edition, Mumbai: N. M. Tripathi, 1977
3. *Scrap Books*, op. cit.
4. Govardhanram Tripathi, *Lilavati Jivankala* 1st published in 1905, 4th revised edition (Mumbai: N. M. Tripathi & Co, 1961)
5. *Scrap Book* I, P. 46
6. Ramprasad P. Bakshi, *Govardhanramnu Manorajya*, 2nd edn. (Bombay : N. M Tripathi, 1992), pp.14-15. Translated from original Gujarati. Unless stated otherwise, translation from all original Gujarati sources has been done by me.
7. *Scrap Book*, I, p.148
8. *Ibid*, p.100
9. K. C. Pandya, opp. cit., p.63
10. *Scrap Book*, I, p. 146
11. *Ibid*, p.27
12. Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi, *Sarasvatichandra* part I, (Mumbai: N M Tripathi, first edition 1887, Eighteenth edition, 1977) Gujarati Preface, p.9
13. *Scrap Book*, I, p.31
14. *Sarasvatichandra*, part 3, Preface, p.3
15. *Scrap Book*, II, p.172
16. *Sarasvatichandra*, part 4, Preface, p.6
17. *Ibid*, part 3, Preface, p.4
18. *Ibid*.
19. *Ibid*, part 4 preface, p.8
20. *Ibid*, p.9
21. *Scrap Book*, I, p.37
22. *Ibid*., I, p.37
23. *Ibid*., I, p.75
24. *Ibid*., I, p.115
25. *Ibid*., I, p.110
26. *Ibid*., I, p. 114
27. *Ibid*., I, p.128
28. *Ibid*., I, p.120
29. *Ibid*., I, p.119. Emphasis in the original.
30. *Ibid*., I, p.137
31. *Ibid*., I, p.181
32. *Ibid*., I, pp.184-185
33. *Ibid*., I, p.186
34. *Ibid*., I, p.238
35. *Ibid*., I, p.262
36. *Ibid*., I, p.121
37. *Ibid*., I, p.263
38. *Ibid*.,
39. *Ibid*., I, p.264
40. *Ibid*.,
41. *Ibid*., I, p.266
42. *Ibid*., I, p.265. Emphasis in the original.
43. *Ibid*., I, p.266
44. Sudhir Chandra, op. cit., p.31
45. *Sarasvatichandra*, part 4, pp.145-165
46. *Ibid*., p.153
47. *Ibid*., p.164
48. *Ibid*.,
49. *Ibid*., p.165
50. *Ibid*., Part 2, p.110
51. Sudhir Chandra, op. cit., p.32
52. *Scrap Book*, I, p.51
53. *Ibid*., p.58
54. *Ibid*., p.149
55. *Ibid*., p.150
56. *Ibid*.,
57. *Sarasvatichandra*, Part 1, p.61
58. *Scrap Book*, II, p.43
59. *Ibid*.
60. *Ibid*.,
61. *Ibid*.,
62. *Ibid*., p.158
63. *Ibid*., p.159
64. *Ibid*., p.174
65. *Sarasvatichandra*, part 2. P.29
66. *Scrap Book*, II, p.84
67. *Ibid*.,
68. *Sarasvatichandra*, part 4, pp.41-94
69. *Ibid*., p.46
70. *Ibid*., p.76
71. *Ibid*.,
72. Sudhir Chandra, "Widow Remarriage and later Nineteenth Century Indian Literature," *Occasional papers on History and Society*, No. XXIV, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murthy House, New Delhi, p.30.
73. *Sarasvatichandra*, Part 4, p.818
74. *Sarasvatichandra*, Part 3, p.352
75. *Ibid*
76. Sudhir Chandra, 'Widow Remarriage and later Nineteenth Century Indian Literature'; op. cit., p.26
77. *Scrap Book*, III, p.67
78. *Lilavati Jivankala*, op. cit., p.93
79. These letters were exchanged in 1906. Govardhanram had sent copies of *Lilavati Jivankala* and *Sarasvatichandra*, to Dayaram

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Gidumul. After reading these books Dayaram entered into this exchange. Out of the total eight letters Dayaram wrote five, while Govardhanram's response to them is contained in three letters.

The first two letters of Dayaram are undated. See for letter 1 to 5, *Govardhanram Shatabdi Granth*, op. cit., pp.60-81 and for letters No. 6,7 and 8 see, *Sriyut Govardhanram*, op. cit., pp.371-377.

80. Dayaram Gidumal to Govardhanram, letter No. 2, *Govardhanram Shatabdi Granth*, p.61
81. Govardhanram to Dayaram Gidumal, letter No. 3, dated 13.3.1906, *Ibid*., pp.61-67
82. Dayaram Gidumal to Govardhanram, letter No. 4, dt.14.3.1906 *Ibid*., pp.67-69
83. Govardhanram to Dayaram Gidumal, letter No. 7, dt.26.3.1906, *Sriyut Govardhanram*, op. cit., p. 377
84. Dayaram Gidumal to Govardhanram, letter No. 8, dt.27.3.1906, *Ibid*.
85. Sudhir Chandra, 'Widow Remarriage and later Nineteenth Century Indian Literature', op. cit., p.29
86. *Scrap Book*, I, p.51
87. At many places in the *Scrap Book* Govardhanram draws parallels between his life and the novel; he compares his wife to his heroine and asks the daughter to follow in the footsteps of Gunsundari, his ideal heroine. He even draws conscious parallels between the two.

    His daughter Jayanti was betrothed at a tender age and this decision hurt Govardhanram. Two days after her engagement he wrote: "Curious coincidence! Jayanti betrothed on 25th, and I get the first proof of the second part of my novel on the 26th. The betrothal pinches me, and I compare myself to Vidya Chatura, who accepting in haste a woman's arguments, betrothed Kumud to Pramad, and dropped all talk of Sarasvatichandra." *Scrap Book*, I, p.93
88. Sonal Shukla has beautifully captured the essence of this new ideal. "He has done extremely well in his studies. He is sensitive and generous but also somewhat haughty and aloof. He has a mission, but no job. He usually belongs to a wealthy family, but does not mind living in poverty, although towards the end he is usually comfortably placed all over again. The novelist and his heroine admire this greatly. Sarasvatichandra is the first modern Gujarati hero of this type." 'Govardhanram's women', *EPW*, October, 31, 1987, p. ws-63
89. *Ibid*., pp. ws. 65-67
90. Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present*, op. cit., p.82

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Writing the Region, Imagining the Nation: A Reading of Bhalchandra Nemade's *Kosla*

E.V. RAMAKRISHNAN

I

Bhalchandra Nemade (b.1938) is one of the pioneers among the modern Indian novelists of post-1960 period, who marked a departure in the way fiction is used to represent reality. His novel *Kosla* (1963) appeared in the same decade as two well-known novels: Anatha Murthy's *Samskara* (1965) in Kannada and O.V.Vijayan's *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* (1969) in Malayalam. While A.K.Ramanujan's translation of *Samskara* that appeared in English translation in 1976 soon became an iconic work of modern Indian fiction, the other two novels did not receive the attention they deserved. O.V.Vijayan's self-translation of *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* was not able to capture the resonance of the dense idiom of the original that had become a cult book for the generation of the late sixties. O.V.Vijayan was a well-known political cartoonist at the national level and had made a name for himself as a political commentator. Besides, his translation was one of the first translations issued by Penguin India. All this ensured a certain visibility for Vijayan's work though it did not receive the attention *Samskara* received. Nemade's novel had established itself as a classic in Marathi by the late 1960s, but the English translation appeared only thirty three years after its publication in Marathi. Perhaps Nemade's novel was the most difficult to translate into English among these three. Sudhakar Marathe's translation has done justice to the original but the linguistic and stylistic complexity of *Kosla* is as much an attribute of its architectural design as its innovative narrative mode and tone. *Kosla* has to be studied as an Indian novel of seminal significance to understand the directions taken by Indian society in the post-colonial period. While we tend to celebrate even minor works of Indian English fiction as 'international literature', works of crucial importance to the study of Indian society are routinely ignored even when translations of the originals exist. Of late, social scientists have made use of Indian fiction in Indian languages to some extent, but no course in Social Sciences in India contains fictional works written in Indian languages.

These three novels merit attention not because they appeared in the same decade, but they take a hard look at Indian modernity and provide us with insights into its moral failures. They do it with involvement and compassion that does not carry the burden of ideological baggage. By the nineteen fifties, the social realist tradition had become moribund and had lost its capacity to develop the narrative apparatus necessary to represent a society caught in moral dilemmas that could not be resolved in terms of simplistic idealistic solutions. The innovative nature of the experimental idiom used in these novels attests to the fact that a critique of society necessarily involves developing a new perspective on society. It is possible to argue that each of these texts has altered the relation between form and content and redefined the very direction of the novel in their respective languages. The new narrative idiom discovers and recovers social and personal spaces that were invisible and intractable to conventions of social realism. This discussion of *Kosala* will focus on its treatment of the moral crisis in the Indian society of the 1960s, the search for the new and emergent social imaginary that is articulated in the novel.

Nemade has been identified with the group of writers in Marathi advocating a 'nativist' approach to literature. Nemade's essay, "The Marathi Novel 1950-1975" outlines a history of Marathi novel tracing it from the colonial times in the 19th century to the present. He talks of three trends in the history of the novel, the *Yamunaparytan* trend, the *Mochangad* trend and the *Muktamala* trend. The *Muktamala* trend gives primacy to convention rather than life and may be termed 'formalistic' in approach. This

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type of novel avoids action and has an affected way of narration. Nemade puts the well-known Marathi novelists like V.S.Khandekar, N.S.Phadke, P.B.Bhave, P.S.Rege and Baba Kadam in this category. The *Mochangad* trend revels in fancy and may be counted as 'popular literature'. The dominant tendency here is to produce a 'non-existent reality'. Eminent writers such as V.S.Khandekar, Ranjit Desai and Haribhau Apte are cited as examples of this category by Nemade. Obviously, he considers the *Yamunaparyatan* trend as central to the history of Marathi novel. He defines this trend in these words: A novelist selects the theme as a verbal action with specific moral angle in the context of the multi-faceted relation between the individual and the community. And in keeping with the theme, the style organizes the form through the medium of language using various techniques.[1]

According to Nemade, the works of novelists such as H.N.Apte, V.M.Joshi, Sane Guruji and Bhau Padhye come under this trend. Nemade believes that this central trend in Marathi novel reflects a response to colonization and modernization. The creation of prose literature was an effective way of countering the oppression created by imperialistic and colonialist forces. The novel of the reformist kind should be seen as part of the organized movements and activities based on reason. It was the expression of a dynamic society which was responding to the new challenges in the wake of the encounter with the superior technology of a dominant culture. The formalist novel of the *Muktamala* type enters a 'mystified world of fantasy' affording escapist routes from the crucial problems of the day. The realist tradition enunciated by *Yamunaparyatan* is notable for its activist role in addressing the larger moral issues of the society. *Yamunaparyatan* talks of the young widow's plight in a convention-bound society. Nemade notes that this tradition subsequently became dormant in Marathi literature as the society lost its larger moral direction. In the post-1960 period in Marathi literature he finds a return to this tradition and feels that it has the vitality to address urgent socio-political and moral issues. Nemade's own novel has to be studied in this context of Marathi novel.

It will be a misnomer to term Nemade as a 'nativist' in the sense of being a 'revivalist' of the obscurantist variety. What he has attempted is to trace a critical tradition in the history of Marathi novel and emphasize its contemporary relevance. He clearly states that: "Culture is not a hot-house, but a soil-bound process; literature is not a theoretical construct but a living phenomenon."[2] A novelist should have 'a nativist awareness' of the roots of a society and its history. Uncritical acceptance of the alien traditions without reference to native histories will result in fraudulent discourses. An uprooted internationalism that parades itself as cosmopolitanism has the effect of disorienting the creative engagement of the artists in pursuit of false goals. The fantasy worlds created by the formalists did not address the living problems of contemporary society and hence Nemade argues for a critical realism that engages the social and the political issues from the perspective of historical awareness. Nativism in this sense, is not a celebration of a 'grand tradition' but an awareness of the socio-political issues that animate the larger moral issues a work of art is derived from. It is an attempt to retrieve and retain a strong sense of community that sustains an ethnic culture.

II

Kosala, seen from this point of view, is the harbinger a critical realism that renovates the mainstream of Marathi novel by interrogating its foundational principles. Though Baba Padamji's social realist tradition could revitalize Marathi society, it had lost its moorings in the twentieth century.

Pandurang Sangvikar is the main character in *Kosala.* The novel traces his journey from childhood to youth. The novel is divided into six sections, each one focusing on a particular phase of his life. Sangvi is a village in the Khandesh region of Maharashtra. Pandurang's father is a rich farmer of the village, and his childhood is spent in the shadow of his disciplinarian ways. The first section deals with his unpleasant childhood and his relations with his family members. He moves out of the village to study in a college in Pune. The second and third sections describe the life in the college for the next four years. He drifts away from his family during this time, with the father's menacing figure lurking in the background. Pandurang fails in the examination and is haunted by a sense of failure. He stays on in Pune to repeat his examination and feels lonely and lost in the big city. Finally he is back in village, with nothing to show to the world after spending long years in Pune. The last two sections deal with his life in the village, alienated from family and community in search of questions he is not equipped to answer.

It must be obvious that the novel is more of a digressive narrative with several episodes loosely connected. The tone is set in the very opening sentence: "Me, Pandurang Sangvikar. Today, for instance, I am twenty five years old. Honestly, there is only this thing worth telling you."[3] The tone is one of irreverence and rejection from the very beginning. Pandurang feels hemmed in by his family and the world around him. The towering image of his father

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leaves him no space for asserting his identity. Once Pandurang, along with his friend Eknath sets out to see the hills and comes back late in the evening. He gets punished by his father: " My legs were throbbing. On top of that, of course, Father plied the switch. I may not mind anything else, but I cannot take being struck with a switch. I shouted at him that this was hardly in keeping with our Hindu religion. Damn your daily prayers in the temple."[4] What vexes Pandurang further is father's miserliness and greed for money. He would make Pandurang apply for freeship at the high school by showing low income, though they were quite well off. He would face humiliation in the class for this. Pandurang adds: " Father was most terrifically after money."[5] Pandurang would practice flute but his father hated the idea of his son playing flute. This also can be seen as one of the earliest scenes in the novel where his family would not approve of his artistic inclinations. Pandurang has his problems with some bullies in the school, engages in night-long battles with the rats that damage his books, resolves to put his life in order according to a set time-table, wants to 'do something great' in life. Most of all, he wants to escape from the village, primarily from his father who, he is afraid, will put him on some short agricultural course and force him into the family profession of tending the agricultural farm. He is greatly relieved when he is sent to a college in Pune for study.

Kosla is a *bildungroman* which portrays the struggles of a young man to discover his own identity. The retrospective gaze of the twenty five year old Pandurang Sangvikar documents those incidents and events that have a bearing on what he is now. His fancies, friendships, failures, all become coloured by the larger theme of the quest for an authentic self and a meaningful relationship with the society around him. In his father he confronts patriarchy for the first time in all its ruthlessness. Later, he would realize that all social institutions are built on hierarchy and they are all equally oppressive. The college and its environment have very little to inspire a creatively restless mind like that of Sangvikar's. He has to cross the gulf between the rural and the urban worlds which seem to be miles apart. He disapproves of his Maushi dressing up and going out, and even suspects her morality: " Everybody in Pune dresses up, it is true. But it is not nice for one's own Maushi to dress up and strut about. Ö Ö But even after behavior like Maushi's if a woman's husband calls her his wife, why anyone else say anything about him." (28). Later he discovers how his friend Madhumilind Ichalkaranjikar seduces girls and feels no guilt about abandoning them. The rebel in him cannot approve of the indulgences of his friends. Sangvikar is a victim of his own contradictions.

In every letter from home, his father mentioned the money he was spending on him and urged him to study well. Pandurang was profligate with money and this landed him in quite a few troubles. The boys from Pune with their superior ways would extract tea from him and exploit him. They were full of self-importance and would correct his English pronunciation. Pandurang says: "Heck! These three were crooks. You'd have to call them crooks. Mind you, once I conveyed my intention to go to dine with them at home — saying, I would do one Sunday with each of you in turn —— they even stopped passing by my door" (31). Pandurang is quick to notice that behind the urban sophistication was the same greed and duplicity he had noticed in the village in his father and others. He notices the same shallowness even in matters of art. He found the comic plays that were performed in college that incited virtual laugh-riots extremely disturbing. Pandurang's own sensibility is at a formative stage and his confrontation with the duplicity and philistinism that characterized the elite institution in Pune wakes him to the complexity of his surroundings. Since self-development happens in relation with the environment of one's own being, Sangvikar's self-creation becomes psychologically harrowing. His disillusionment with the 'learned teachers' adds to this state of confusion. He says: "Truth to tell, the notions I used to have before about the erudition of my teachers proved correct in only one or two cases" (p.55). Most of the teachers had nothing new to say. The teachers of Sanskrit and Marathi left him cold. As the Secretary of College Debating Society, his attempts at Public Speaking turn into disasters. Even serious occasions such as a speech by a Gandhian or a debate on "War and World Peace," arouses laughter when handled by Sangvikar. He rarely attended classes and when he did so he and his friends would distribute parodies of famous lines from Marathi poems.

Sangvikar was unable to handle money and this lands him in a series of problems. As Mess Secretary, he discovers that there is a deficit of six hundred rupees at the end of the year. He has been sympathetic to Ramappa, the cook who has spent a lifetime in the hostel's kitchen and is unable to accept that he is telling lies. He had entrusted the job of collecting money to Vaidya and now Vaidya blames Ramappa. Finally, he has to send a letter to his father requesting for money, keeping aside the humiliation it involved. The theme of money is central to the narratives of growing up. In Sangvikar's case, it is his sensitivity and lack of ruthlessness that turns him into a victim. While those who can exploit the system flourish, students like him end up as failures. When he left the course in history and opted for Marathi and English, his father was again furious. He wrote: "You are an ass. If

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you must read the *Dnyaneshwari,* why go to college for that? Don't we read it at home too?" (p.122).

After his initial unpleasant experiences as office bearer in the college mess and debating society, he withdraws completely into a cocoon. The novel's title suggests the formative phase of an insect before it emerges fully grown into light. Sangvikar's struggles with his environment bring out the contradictions in himself as well as the system. The middle class of Maharashtra had become self-seeking and consumerist in the post-1947 period. The individual was the measure of all things. This meant that community values or anything that would benefit society at large had very little relevance for the young generation. After withdrawing from public activity, Sangvikar reads recklessly and is plagued by thoughts of all kinds. He even observes silence for eight days in a row. There are times when he walked entire nights through the hills or the streets. Once he even lands up in the police station, along with his friend for wandering in the nights.

He had a Marathi teacher called Gune who had reputation of being a good scholar and writer. He kept a house in Mumbai and another in Pune. This obsession with security in life was at odds with the lofty ideas of modernism he elaborated. Gune would buy the latest books and comment on the latest ideas in his critical works. Sangvikar met many Marathi writers at his place and found most of them pompous and insincere. He has a long argument with an eminent Marathi writer who states that English poets had made greater progress than poets in many other languages. Finally, he parts ways with Gune whose annoyance at Sangvikar's critical tone was reflected in his words, " Your reading is inadequate and your chattering excessive" (p. 189). One of the final arguments they had was over Gune's statement, "literary writers are superior to ordinary human folk" (p.189). Sangvikar's line of thought shows how he was against setting the literary as an insular domain of sanctity cut off from ordinary life: "Now I have myself seen many people who are great and yet haven't written a single line. Only fifteen per cent can read and write, so does that mean there is no greatness in the remainder of humanity?" (Ibid). The larger moral question that *Kosla* raises can be located here. Literature need to be anchored in the ordinary life of the community. The flow of common life that brings out the contradictions in the ideological positions of intellectuals who live a double life, one at the personal level and the other at the intellectual level, bothers Sangvikar. The positions of critics like Gune have something spurious about them. He would rather align with the ordinary and observe life critically, than profess any theory that may sound lofty but contradict the life he lived. In this sense, one of the central themes of *Kosla* is how to bring life and art/ literature in consonance with each other. He finds the fascination with the new or modern inauthentic since it does not enable Indians comprehend life lived around him. The intellectual fascination with the West should not become a narcissistic pursuit for self-importance. Nemade's own nativist position may be read into the text here but, as argued earlier, it is not a celebration of the obscurantist and regressive.

III

Sangvikar suffers a traumatic loss in the death of his sister, Mani. He was very close to his younger sister. When he got the news of her death he could not believe it: "I was so shaken I thought, How can anyone just die like that?" When Mani was ill, his father was busy demolishing their house and rebuilding it. He felt his father had not paid enough attention to her. Only occasionally he would bring a doctor. Sangvikar blazed with rage after hearing the news: "I said, I will murder Father. I'll kill Grandma. Then I will set fire to that whole house. I'll burn all their cadavers in that house. Spare only Mother. O to die thus" (150). Sangvikar could not contain the fury and rage at the death of his sister for many days. He buys a yellow sari such as little girls wear, cuts it into pieces, burns them and burns his own fingers in the blaze. He wanders through the streets of Pune during nights. The anguish he felt at her death was his initiation into the mystery of death. Perhaps Sangvikar had felt such intense pain all his life. His anger against the insensitive father now becomes an awareness about the vulnerability of life itself. He makes a trip to Ajanta around this time. The huge sculptures of Buddha there along with the paintings on his life and philosophy move Sangvikar deeply. His own pain appears small and trivial in comparison with the burden of pain Buddha had internalized in his gestures and visage:

> This suffering at once expansive and infinitesimal cannot be grasped between one's fingertips. It is a sorrow that whirls round and round. Even to drink of sorrow one needs to cup palms of sorrow. It is impossible to measure this desert-vast sorrow by my cowrie-sized sorrow. Mine are circumscribed little woes. How can I perceive this face through the narrow chink of my pain? I crash down into the abysmal sorrow on that stone face. Now the circumference of my pain too becomes immeasurable (153).

The tone of this passage is different from that of earlier passages. The awe inspired by the art of Ajanta is reflected in the dense writing in this section. This becomes an 'intertext' to capture the grief at the bereavement of Mani. Sangvikar's passage through this traumatic experience

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amounts to a rite of passage from the innocence of carefree adolescence to a stage of greater maturity. Now he distances himself from the new house built by his father since it signifies his patriarchal arrogance and insensitivity. He sees it as a tomb built on the dead body of his sister. He feels that the old house was better. His lost childhood spent in the open spaces in the company of people comes back to him. The new house was like a fortress, shutting off people from gaining easy access. When he goes to his new room, he finds it isolated and closed to the outside world. He looks for an opportunity to have a showdown with his father. Finally, he talks back to his Father for an hour without pause, addressing him irreverently. Mother had to drag him away from there. The break with his father is now complete.

Pandurang's emergence as a young man is accompanied by a deepening sense of alienation from his family, village and community. It is here that Nemade's ironic comments on the historical discourse become relevant. We have noted earlier that one of the pastimes of Sangvikar and his friends was to parody the famous lines from Marathi poetry. Sureh, a friend of Sangvikar, begins a parody of history textbooks which gradually becomes a way of lampooning nationalist historiography. Once, both of them were locked up in the police station for the night, for wandering in the streets. Here they tried the patience of the policemen by resorting to the discourse of history text-books:

Every government used to have a Police Department.

Now you might ask who is this Government? What does Police mean?

Now, that gentlemen, who in the public street went about openly in a pair of shorts, with a stave in his hand, and caught thieves for you—that was a Policeman.

It appears that Policemen must have been born out of an inherent desire for law and order in the Nation. Because, why else would anyone do the work of catching thieves, in shorts at that, and on a measly income of eighty or ninety rupees a month.

Now what does Government mean? Every nation used to have a Government.

Some eight or ten ancient persons would come together, and for a salary they would look after the balance sheet of the Nation.

Once in a way, two or three governments would come into conflict.

This does not mean the Oldies themselves came to blows. First having created some quarrel out of nothing, the Oldies would send altogether different younger men to their National borders to fight, while they themselves watched the fun from the rooftops. (178)

There are many such passages in the novel that become hilarious interludes in the narrative. The idea of history as a grand narrative documenting the momentous events in the life of the nation is lampooned from the perspective of youth who do not see themselves as part of the nation. Sangvikar's alienation from the family and society assumes a larger political dimension here. In his introduction to the English version of the novel, Chandrasekhar Jahagirdar has noted that the Maharashtrian middle class's shift towards the values of material success, careerism, social status and prestige has created a crisis of values and this results in the alienation of Sangvikar from the larger society. He also adds that Sangvikar is put off by the pervasive 'phoniness' of the system:

What hurts is to find that in the adult world that surrounds him, values are systematically distorted behind facades of social decency and institutional security. The hypocrisy blankets both the rural and urban so that in *Kosla* there is no nostalgia for some kind of rural stability destroyed in the process of social change. The hypocrisy pervades every area of life—from agriculture in the villages to the literary circles in the cities. (p.xi)

Nation as a moral idea has to be anchored in the life of the community. Modernity as it was defined in the colonial context had questioned the unbridled individualism of the Western culture and emphasized the moral values that would enable us to define an inclusive nation. The 'phoniness' that Sangvikar experiences at every stage of his journey, from the village to the city, indicates the failure of the moral imagination that underlies the idea of an Indian nation. In writing the region of Maharashtra, Nemade is pointing to the illegitimacy at the core of the nation and the need to re-imagine it.

In the last two sections of the novel the author points to the resources that may hold out the possibility of such a reimagining. Sangvikar is now back in his village, having failed in the B.A. examination. His days are given to aimless wanderings and reflections. He reads Mahanubhav literature of the eleventh century and finds a kindred soul in the figure of Chakradhar Swami who had preached renunciation as a way of discovering oneself. He quotes the following lines from Chakradhar with approval: "One's own country needs to be forsaken:/ One's own village needs to be forsaken:/ The relation of relations particularly needs to be forsaken." (222). Sangvikar is unable to follow the path of renunciation, caught as he is in moral doubts for which there are no clear answers. His friend Giridhar who shares his alienation and sense of futility still is capable of acting. He chooses to put into practice what he felt was right.

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Sangvikar, on the other hand, feels a sense of void, unable to believe in anything. He knows it takes courage to say, "No" and that is what is needed to reconstitute oneself. It is this realization of the need to say 'No' that makes this novel a comment on Indian modernity.

Nemade's linguistic and stylistic experiments merit detailed discussion. But, here, for want of space we can only highlight a few notable features of his language and style.

The use of colloquial speech, particularly the slang of the college youth, gives the novel an expansive rhythm and flow which can absorb a variety of experiences that are comic, gross, profound and sometimes, even sublime. He moves to the densely lyrical passages on Ajanta and the meditative passages of the last two sections without disrupting the energetic tempo of the narrative. Words such as 'for instance' and 'etc.' suddenly crop up and lighten the narrative even as it allows us to see the mind of the narrator in a flash. The subtle humour of the parodic passages mimicking the nationalist historiography must be the first example of post-modernist pastiche in modern Indian fiction. The range of his stylistic variations from rustic humour and folk-tale to Baudelairean wanderings in the city communicate a variety of moods and attitudes that gradually build up the anguish and agony of a generation caught in a moral crisis without easy solutions. It is a novel that needs to be studied deeply for what it offers in terms of style and substance.

Notes

1. See Ganesh Devy, ed., *Indian Literary Criticism: Theory and Interpretation*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2010, p. 194.
2. Ibid., p. 193
3. Bhalchandra Nemade, *Cocoon*, translated from Marathi (*Kosla* first published in Marathi in 1965) by Sudhakar Marathe, New Delhi: Macmillan India, 1997, p. 1. (All subsequent page numbers referred to are to this edition.).
4. Ibid., p, 3.
5. Ibid

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Review Article

Ginanic Travails, Conflicted Knowledge

M.G. VASSANJI

Tazim R Kassam and Francoise Mallison, eds., *Gināns: Texts and Contexts,* Delhi: Primus Books, 2010, pp. Xxvi + 225, Rs 795.

Oral traditions, by their very natures—diffuse, noncanonical, and lacking precise records—are prone to the exigencies of time, easily becoming sites for contesting ideologies and "truths." The volume under review is a collection of essays on the religious songs from western India called ginans, little known outside the community, or communities, that have preserved them; it opens some doors—if only by cracks—to new discussions and alternative perceptions of this phenomenon, while at the same time scrutinizing its management in modern times with a refreshing openness. This is also a frustrating volume, in that it reflects some of the confusions and contradictions that abound regarding the ginans and the religious ideologies and identity politics to which the communities and their oral traditions have been subjected. The term *ginan* actually belongs to the historically and ethnically related oral traditions of several groups, who today unequivocally identify themselves as either Hindus or Muslims, though in all likelihood they did not do so in the past; however, it is people of Khoja origin who have largely initiated the modern academic study of the ginans, affirming their importance as a historical, literary, and spiritual tradition, and as an area of identity contention in modern times. In this book, dedicated to the scholar Zawahir Moir, the "Ismaili Khoja" community occupies a central place; consequently it is this particular group and its relationship to the ginanic tradition that will be the focus of this review.[1]

First, for the noninitiate, a clarification of two basic terms.

Khojas are an Indian community from the Kathiawad and Kutch areas of western Gujarat,[2] now spread out in India, Pakistan, East Africa, North America, and Europe. They speak Gujarati or Kutchi and sometimes both languages, and are related to the (Kshatriya) Lohana caste with whom they share their *attak*s or family names.[3] Until recently, the majority of Khoja male first names were of forms characteristically ending in *–ji* , thus Kanji, Nanji, Ramji, Sunderji, Raghavji, Shivji, some of them very obviously the names of Indian gods. The Khoja prayer house is popularly called the *khano* (from "jamat khana"), in which congregants sit on the floor, men on one side and women on the other, reminding one of a gurudwara. There is indication from the oral tradition that the prayer house or congregation might previously have been referred to as *gata* (from the Sanskrit root *gam*, "to go"[4]). In the khano, the main prayer was in Kutchi until the 1950s, when it was replaced by an Arabic prayer consisting of Quranic verses;[5] singing of ginans, however, have constituted an essential part of the ceremonies. The head of the congregation, to this day, is called *mukhi* (Skt. *mukha,* "head"), who sits facing the congregation.[6] Services—the giving of blessings, for example—are conducted in Kutchi. (More recently, in North America, English is gradually being introduced.) At the end of services, a prasada of sooji halwa is given, called sukhreet (Skt. *sukarita*), together with "holy" water consecrated in modern times by the Imam. In my childhood, at the back of the khano was a takhat, a large, cushioned throne, on which sat the picture of the Imam. At the end of formal prayers, or indeed at any time of the day, people would go to the takhat, make a small offering, join their hands, and say a personal prayer, usually asking for favours, in much the same way people do in temples. The khano is thus in no way like a conventional mosque.[7]

The Khoja ginan tradition has been remarkably enduring. To this day, in Canada, where I live, youngsters

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speaking only a smattering of Kutchi or Gujarati, will still learn a ginan from an elder and recite it in the khano. Their parents will recall the legendary ginan-singers and memorable ginan recitals from their time. Nevertheless, it is a beleaguered tradition, as some of the observations of this volume affirm, and how long and in what form this tradition will survive remains a question.

Arguably the most important spiritual teacher or guru of the Khojas was Pir Sadardeen, who is believed to have lived some time in the fourteenth century.[8] The uncertainty in his dates is significant, reminding us that much of Khoja history remains speculative. According to tradition Pir Sadardeen was born in Multan and travelled to Benares for sacred learning; in his compositions he refers to himself as Satguru and Guru Sahadev. The ginans attributed to him are mostly in Gujarati, and the most numerous, and are steeped in the Indian Vaishnavite tradition. The followers, or the faithful, are referred to as *virabhai* (*vira*, Skt. "hero"), *munivara* ("best of munis"), *rikhisara* (great rshi) and also *momanabhai* (momin + bhai) , in the same way as Kabir exhorts the "sadhus" in his dohas.

The ginanic corpus includes devotional compositions about or directly addressed to Hari, or Krishna; spiritual or mystical ones concerned with the mortality of human life in the Kali Age and the cycle of 8,400,000 (*lakha chorasi*) rebirths facing a person in this world, and the desire to attain *moksha* or release; ginans of a celebratory nature describing the future arrival of the tenth avatar of Vishnu from the west (*pachhama desa)* to Jambudvipa (India), amidst great pomp, when he would defeat the great army of the daitya Kalinga and be greeted by, among others, the satis, Kunti and Anasuya. There are also some remarkable longer tracts of a metaphysical nature running into several hundred verses, called *granth*s. Among them are the *Buddhavatar*, the life of the Buddha, the eighth avatar of Vishnu; *Dasa Avatar,* about the ten avatars of Vishnu; *Saloko Moto* (*saloko* presumably from Skt. *shloka); Atharva Veda; To Munivara Bhai*, a description of the genesis of the universe.. Their language tends to be archaic and sometimes with what appear to be mock Sanskritic endings.[9] Some of them proceed with a sub- or super-heading: "Sri Guru Bhirama ho vaca." Only a few of these granths are ever recited today.

In his "syncretistic" theology, Pir Sadardeen, or Guru Sahadev, equates the Quran with the Atharva Veda, the fourth book of the Vedas; and he equates Muhammad with Brahma, and Ali (the first Shia imam) with Vishnu or Krishna (Hari). To the simple Khoja villager, Muhammad and Ali, without their historical associations, would have been merely names; they are also much less frequently invoked than Hari, or Krishna, the familiar god depicted in icons, whose exploits were constantly related in the ambient culture. (To this day, a bhajan about the exploits of the child Krishna can bring a smile upon a Khoja face.) The typical Khoja, a villager, of course could read neither the Quran nor the Vedas.

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The term *Ismaili* is the name of a small esoteric, unorthodox denomination of the Shia branch of Islam that existed in West Asia and was long (and sometimes still is) regarded as heretic.[10] In the last several decades, the term has come to describe people whose spiritual leader is the Aga Khan, their Imam, claiming direct descent from Ali and the Prophet of Islam. Interwoven within this seemingly simple identity, however, are skeins of complex, forgotten, and sometimes disputed histories. *Ismaili* is today an umbrella term describing various peoples of different ethnicities, places of origins, languages, religious traditions, and histories, all subscribing to some form of belief in the Ismaili Imam. Among Khojas, the Imam is (or was) the foretold tenth avatar of Vishnu, called the Nakalanki (or nishkalanki) avatar; for Afghans or Tajiks, this identification with all its richness of associations, obviously, would not have held. There is no reason to believe either that all those diverse peoples, generally poor, not educated, and rural, communicated with, or indeed were aware of, each other in premodern times.

Ismaili history in Iran and the Middle East is quite colourful and sometimes extremely tangled. In 909 the Fatimid Caliphate, under Imam-Caliphs who traced their lineage to Ali, the cousin of the Prophet, and Fatima, his daughter, was established in what is now Morocco. Later, in the 960s, the Fatimids conquered Egypt, and founded Cairo, which became their new capital. At the end of the eleventh century a succession dispute took place, as a result of which, in 1092, the child Nizar, the younger son of the deceased Caliph, was spirited away to Iran. The Fatimid Caliphate however lasted into the twelfth century, when it was finally destroyed by Saladin. The exiled Ismailis in Iran (the "Nizaris") had meanwhile occupied the Alamut ("Assassin") fortresses, which went on to become the stuff of hearsay and legend. They were destroyed by the Mongol Hulagu Khan in 1256; the Imam of the time was murdered and the Ismailis were dispersed.

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How did the Gujarati Khojas come to be identified as Ismailis? The term "Ismaili" does not occur in the ginans.

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In my travels throughout Kathiawad,[11] whenever in some village I asked for an Ismaili or Agakhani, I would meet a perfectly blank stare; it was only when I asked for a Khoja or the Khoja khanu (khano), that a finger would point out, to a paan stall, a vegetable seller, some trader. Over the past several decades, a Grand Narrative has been constructed to reinforce the Khoja=Ismaili identity that, to put it mildly, raises some questions. Interestingly, and perhaps appropriately, other grand narratives have been constructed by historically related communities, for example the one at Pirana in Gujarat, at the prominent shrine of Imamshah, a grandson of Sadardeen.[12]

The Ismaili-Khoja Grand Narrative runs as follows. Centuries ago, Ismaili missionaries (dai's) were sent from Iran to western India to bring converts to their fold. How to convert the Indians, steeped in their ancient, idolatrous culture and religion, with its joyful forms of worship and multitudinous and endless stories, into an austere and mystical faith whose stories occur in desert lands, and often involve betrayal and bloodshed? A tactic came forward: why not couch Ismaili and Islamic concepts in Hindu terms? Thus, refer to Ali as Hari (for the time being), and to Muhammad as Brahma, and so on. It is as though some masterminds some hundreds, or thousands, of miles away, like le CarrÈ's spy master Karla, had planted Ismaili "sleeper" notions or concepts as "moles," to emerge and come into action in the future when the time was appropriate.

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Tazim R Kassam, one of the two editors of this volume, in her contribution, "Reframing Ginanic Studies: Thoughts on Multiple Positions and Heuristic Tropes," considers first the different perspectives from which the ginans can be studied, before getting down to business and engaging with the Grand Narrative, in the process contesting the simplistic idea of conversion (a concept to which she admits ascribing in the past). According to the author, "The conversion theory as a framework for understanding the Ginans was first put forward in 1866 CE by the British judge Sir Joseph Arnold in the Bombay High Court when he ruled on what came to be known famously as the Aga Khan Case." (9) Those British again; whether the attribution is strictly accurate or not, in modern times the idea of conversion has been enthusiastically embraced and propagated at a brisk pace by scholars and promoters of the modern Ismaili identity: the dichotomy is easy and convenient, lending itself to binary notions of true and deviant, Muslim and non-Muslim, Hindu and Muslim. However, as Kassam points out, "The confusion that this trope is responsible for has resulted in mishandling of the Ginan tradition including possibly a large-scale burning and destruction of Khojki manuscripts by the Ismailis [sic] themselves that occurred in the early 1900s, and, as many scholars... know from first-hand experience, the continued blocked access to existing manuscripts of Ginans collected and housed in the community's centralized library collections [especially, one presumes, the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London]." (8) Furthermore, is the so-called conversion a rejection of the old "Hinduism" or is it a transformation? For the Khojas, devotees of Hari, an avatar of Vishnu and Lord of Vaikunth, it was definitely not rejection.

There is also the ethical consideration to which I have alluded above: the conversion story implies that the Khojas were essentially duped by their pirs; in the words of the author, "[the logic of conversion]...casts aspersions on the da'wa [the missionary system] by more or less suggesting that it devised a sophisticated system of entrapment to win converts to the cause."(13)

This important paper then breaks new ground in ginan studies; unfortunately it suffers from the tendency to couch in jargon and academese what are in essence very basic ideas that could have been boldly and simply stated. Perhaps this obscuring cloak is necessary to foil the extremist fringe, always active on the Internet with sticks and stones. My more serious objection to this paper, however, is that it appears to hedge its arguments, unable or unwilling to set aside the same "politics of representation" it censures. While affirming the problems associated with the "use of such generic, essentialist, and abstract terms 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' (or 'Ismaili')," (11) it still manages to trip over them. Thus: "Ginans are a repository and reflection of over eight centuries of Shi'a Ismaili Muslim activity and creativity in the Indian subcontinent." (1) This is a big claim indeed, against whose premises I will take issue below. It assiduously avoids the term "Khoja" (except when speaking of the Aga Khan Case, when it cannot be avoided), a term still used by the community everywhere to describe itself, more so in Gujarat. She prefers "Ismaili Muslim," which is doubly abstract and could as well refer to a Syrian or an Azerbaijani, but we are speaking of Gujarati Khojas. It is as though the term "Methodist Christian" were enough to describe a person from Accra, Bangkok, or Philadelphia.

If the ginans are not coded "Ismailese," then what are they? They were, says the author, "an act of creativity that formulated Ismaili ideals anew within a different cultural setting, and it was premised on a genuine appreciation of the richness of myths, symbols, and religious insights that existed within the Indic environment." (15)

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Unfortunately, this is not as great a leap forward as it first appears. What does "appreciation" entail? It sounds like patronizing by a detached observer, in which case it is not far from deception. A believer does not see the stories of his religious culture as myths and symbols; rather, they are vital forms of belief, devotion, and contemplation. Furthermore, who was it who "formulated" the "Ismaili ideal"? According to local Indian belief, Krishna's kingdom was at Dwarka, in Gujarat, a stone's throw (loosely speaking) from the homes of the Khojas. What did the formulators, who sound more like academic aesthetes, or subtle propagandists, make of that?—wink and pretend to believe, while they knew for themselves that the real Hari, who was Ali, had lived and ruled in Arabia? Here the text is abstruse, but it appears that Kassam resorts to the Da'wa system to explain the creative process, and we enter the realm of Islamic theology.

What was the Da'wa? It was the Ismaili Imam's missionary or propaganda organization.13 The impression is given, here and elsewhere in this volume, of the Da'wa as an extensive mastermind network existing since Fatimid times (the tenth century) to define, control, and propagate a uniform, canonical Ismaili faith. According to Kassam, "The Ismaili Da'wa…is an institution headed by the Ismaili Imamat that must provide pertinent spiritual guidance and moral teaching or hidayah, intellectually appropriate and meaningful within each unique cultural and historical setting and encounter." This is pure faith or ideology. The reality is murkier. As Daftari, more or less the official historian of the Ismailis, states, after the fall of Alamut (1256) in Iran, for several centuries the Ismaili Imams lived in obscurity; "practically nothing" is known about them until the later part of the fifteenth century.[14] For some period there were, in fact, two competing lines of Imams.[15] The Da'wa system during this period was virtually nonexistent, and the Ismaili communities (wherever they were) existed independently.[16] When the Da'wa emerged as a central propaganda network in Anjudan, in Iran, this was at least a hundred years after the legendary Sadardeen had wandered through western India.

The presence of an outside, manipulative influence on the Gujarati Khojas, the followers of Guru Sahadev, is too simplistic a conception, though no doubt convenient for propaganda. But even if such an agency existed, it is hard to believe its influence would have permeated into all the little communities scattered over western Gujarat, including the Khojas, the Piranapanthis, and others. Indians at the folk level are independent, flexible, and creative—some might say anarchic—in their worship. I have come across Khojas in Kathiawadi villages quietly worshipping at their own private shrines side by side with carrying on their other more regular practice, in spite of the central doctrinaire organization in existence today. In India, even today, people of all and no religious beliefs visit Sufi shrines and follow various gurus according to their current needs and inclinations.[17] There is also the question of authorship of the texts and of revisions at the local level.[18] Where does the outside formulator and appreciator come into this scenario? Daftari says, of the oral tradition, "The ginans and other sectarian religious writings and traditions are often inaccurate on chronological details...frequently mixing legend with reality...."[19] This implied criticism should be turned on its head: what it says, in effect, is that the Indian oral tradition was not in touch with what was happening in Iran.

Another, more complex, narrative seems to me more plausible, in which we have parallel traditions, independent of central authority, some Vaishnavite, some Shaivite, some Tantrik, and so on, all inspired by the presence at one time or another in the distant past of a guru or pir who came from the Ismaili tradition. Moreover, we would not expect these various Indian traditions to have remained static. This does not place the Khoja tradition, if indeed there was a single one, in the centre as the real one, with others as mere offshoots or deviants.

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The ginans present a conundrum for many who so desperately seek their and their community's legitimation in the universe of Islam. Why a professed devotee or mystic has the need to be identified, absolutely and desperately, with one or the other of the larger mainstream traditions reflects a predicament of our age. Perhaps, to modern Khojas, this identification lends the prestige of a solid and grand—as opposed to a folk and obscure—history, and the reflected glory of historical and intellectual triumphs, however foreign and distant they are in reality. One should not, however, discount the pressure from outside, mainline forces, especially in the subcontinent, as demonstrated in Pakistan recently (January 2011) in the blasphemy controversy.

Besides the destruction of Khoja manuscripts in the past and the "blocking" of access today, as alluded to by Kassam, there have been revisions and constant attempts to interpret them from Islamic viewpoints. Michel Boivin in his contribution to this volume documents this "management" of the "religious heritage." As he notes, "From the middle of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century, the Khoja tradition was

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reconstructed several times." (37) (The middle of the nineteenth century is when Aga Khan I arrived in India from Iran, as a guest of the Raj and the foretold avatar. Modern Khoja history, including the assorted conflicts and splits, as well as a systematic "management" of the tradition, begins with this intersection of history with mythology.)

A lot of information is presented by Boivin about attempts made in Sindh to link the ginans to Sufism and Vedanta, for example, but unfortunately the article gets somewhat confusing, reading like a list of all Sindhis who had anything to say on the subject. Self-interested, individual interpretations are quoted but we don't know how broadly accepted they were. Some dates would have helped. Moreover, Boivin's explanation of ginanic terms without reference to a ginan needs more convincing. We need convincing too that the ginans were originally composed in Sindhi and then translated. Are we talking of all ginans? Surely not. And where are the Sindhi manuscripts? To say, pace Zawahir Moir, that "19 percent of the total vocabulary used in the Ismaili [sic] Ginans is Arabo-Persian," is neither here nor there: as Boivin himself and others in this volume attest, revisions have been constant; furthermore, these terms are not uniformly distributed throughout the corpus—the granths would have a tiny percent of such terms, for example; and many of these terms—duniya, qayam, didar, iman—are common in everyday Gujarati and Hindi and can be found in the available dictionaries. He uses the already contested terms such as "conversion," "Hindu," and "Muslim" without question. To say that "Naklanki is the Hindu word to designate the saviour, the Mahdi of the Muslims," (40) raises problems at so many levels that it is best to say nothing more here. And the Panjabi Indian Ismailis are not Khojas, they are called Shamsis.

"Like most sacred literature," writes Dominique Sila-Khan, "the Ginanic heritage cannot be considered as an immutable literary tradition that has been created and transmitted without any change, since an 'ideal beginning' to the present time.... the Ginans must have undergone a series of gradual transformations that render meaningless the very concept of 'original' texts or of a perfectly 'pure and pristine' tradition." This much is obvious and it is refreshing to see it plainly stated. Not only do alternate versions of ginans exist; their language varies from the archaic to that which is easily understandable to modern audiences and could not possibly have come to us unaltered.[20] Sila-Khan considers the extensive rewriting of the ginans in modern times undertaken by the Imamshahis of Pirana, in parallel with the rewriting undertaken by the Khojas. The comparison, illustrated by the example of the canonical *Das Avatara* is fascinating. The Khoja version contains a lot more "Islamic terms" than the Pirana version, and indeed more than any other ginan of Pir Sadardeen that I have come across. The *Das Avatar* was recited every day up to the 1950s. Despite the extensive revisions it was officially banned, along with other ginans, at a conference in 1975, because of its "Hindu" elements. It is still fondly recalled by people and is available in a private recording.

Thontya and Malleson give two ginans apparently common to the Khoja and the Barmati traditions. The Khoja versions were, however, published by a "defector," one Sachedina Nanjiani, during the contentious period of the late nineteenth century, and are unattributed—do not have a signature line—and also do not exist in any Khoja compilation today. What the authors mean by calling them a faithful reproduction of the "chaotic oral form of the texts" is mystifying. Nanjiani must have edited the text. Balwant Jani gives us some more ginans, these ones attributed to unknown composers. The article "The Entanglement of the Ginans in Khoja Governance" by Amrita Shodhan is worth reading for an appreciation of the ideological climate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries during which the Khoja compilations and editions were made.

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There is a central presumption that runs through most of these articles. It is the idea that a pure Ismaili (or Nizari Ismaili) tradition existed at one time in India, from which others have deviated or fallen away. It is remarkable how revision soon becomes fact, as does an unsubstantiated idea repeated often enough. If it does not make sense to speak of "an ideal beginning," as Sila-Khan says, and so much history, centuries old, is so much myth and revision and ideology, what sense does it make to speak of "branches" that "eventually...separated from the Satpanthis" instead of simply considering the different sects as parallel traditions? (The term *satpanth*, "true path," is sometimes used in the ginans to denote the faith or path of the devotee; it could be purely descriptive and in that sense is probably widely used by diverse communities, ginanic or otherwise. The term *Satpanthi* appears to be a recent trend among some academics to describe the community or communities associated with the ginans. The Khojas never refer to themselves by this description.)

We do not know, as far as I am aware, what ginans were collected from where; it is very possible that various Khoja communities had their own ginans that they had preserved, in the same way as other, non-Khoja, people did. We do not even know (there is no proof) that, until

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the nineteenth century, there was a central, organized Khoja community. The fact that there were so many splits in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, into Sunni, Shia, Ismaili ("Agakhani"), Arya Samaj, and presumably other factions[21] indicates an absence of uniformity and strong coherence. It is possible that there were a number of separate communities spawned in various regions by gurus or pirs who passed through and were never seen again and were remembered subsequently only through songs and legends.

What is often forgotten in studying the ginans is the obvious fact that words are not simply words, they arose within a cultural matrix. The devotional ginans belong to the bhakti tradition; many of their terms, their tropes are common to other bhakti poets. Those who know their ginans are often delighted at the familiarity of Meera bhajans and Kabir dohas. Moreover, to the people who recited and listened to them they were charged with cultural associations and beliefs going back a millennium or more. Thus Hari is not equal to Ali, as x=y; Hari is Krishna, born in Mathura, he is the butter thief, the teaser of gopis, the slayer of demons, and so on. The listener conjures up these pictures of Krishna aided by icons and paintings. To the Khoja in a village, until recently, and perhaps even now, Ali was a cipher, a name for Hari. It has been an unfortunate tendency of modern scholars, having studied Islam in the academies, to come to the ginans armed with Arabic and a toolbox of medieval Islamic terms, but without appropriate knowledge of Indian languages and cultures; with academic respectability the tradition begins to see itself as an extension of "Islam" that looks to the Near and Middle East and away from its roots in India.

The ginans should be studied for what they are, an Indian literary form inspired by Ismaili esoteric influence centuries ago. To be sure they contain their characteristics. The mystical and devotional themes and images in them are, of course, common to many faiths, Indian or otherwise; there are linguistic peculiarities, and versions of Indian mythology: the awaited arrival of the nishkalanki tenth avatar of Vishnu from the west, his defeat of the daitya Kalinga, and wedding to the virgin, vishwa kunwari (kumari); the story of Harishchandra and Tara Rani, which was so beloved in the East Africa in which I grew up, recited especially on New Year's eve (it was also beloved to the famous Kathiawadi, Gandhi); the elevated status of Kunti (Mata Kunta), Draupadi, and Anasuya; references to "Pahelaj" (presumably Prahlada) and "Jujesthana" (presumably Yudhisthira). There is, remarkably, the near-absence of Shiva or Kali[22] (though one must not forget under what conditions the compilations were made). These are wonderful stories; they are Indian stories; and they are Khoja stories.

A K Ramanujan, has famously called attention to the "many Ramayanas"[23] of India, including Jaina and folk versions, besides Valmiki's canonical one:

> How many *Ramayanas?* Three hundred? Three thousand? At the end of some *Ramayanas,* a question is sometimes asked: How many *Ramayanas* have there been? And there are stories that answer the question. Here is one.

And the Khojas have a *Gita*,[24] and their own versions of canonical stories. One might expect that the community would treasure such an inclusive heritage that defies rigid, fundamentalist divisions that cause so much havoc in the world. Instead, the modern tendency is to root out what is "Hindu" in this heritage; that this tendency has not been without its contradictions, and has not been easy or without resistance, proves a point.[25]

When the Bamyan Buddha statues were proposed to be destroyed, because the Afghans had surpassed their ancient Buddhist faith, so the Taliban said, it was proposed that a curtain be placed over them so that they did not offend.[26] They decided to go ahead and destroy them.

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I am grateful to Mohamed Alibhai for carefully reading an earlier version of this essay and his corrections and recommendations; and to Ghulam Sheikh for an enlightening discussion on the subject of Kathiawadi folk traditions.

Notes

1. Other Indian and Pakistani Ismailis are the Mumnas of Gujarat and the Shamsis of Punjab.
2. There are Khojas in Sindh too, see article in this volume by Boivin.
3. My description of the Khojas here is based on personal observation, in East Africa from the 1950s onwards, and therefore are of a time and place. Obviously they reflect practices brought over from Gujarat.
4. I make this observation from its usage in the ginan "gatamahe avine..." but would be happy to be corrected.
5. The old prayer was recited, as is the new one, by a single person while the rest of the congregation sat cross-legged on the mat.
6. Beside the mukhi sits an assistant, the *kamadia*; in the women's section the wives of the mukhi and kamadia preside, facing the women.
7. There were other ceremonies and practices which have gone out of use, for example, on special days, the *ghadi,* an elaborate procession consisting of pairs of women, each pair with an older woman holding a ghadi (pot) over the younger woman's head, that went around or through the seated congregation;

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the *nyani*, in which an odd number of girls (typically seven) would be fed by a family in their home and given presents, in expectation of blessings; the story, told in Kutchi, of a woodcutter and his mother, recited on the fast of the seventh day after the new moon. The fast itself was referred to as *sati ma jo rojo,* the Fast of the Sati-Mother. It is worth noting here that the haj, he Ramadan fast, and reciting of the Quran have not been part of Khoja religious practice.

8. Farhad Daftari, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines* (London: Cambridge UP, 1990) p. 479. Also, Abualy A Aziz, *A Brief History of Ismailism* (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 1974).
9. For example, *Athar Vedam* begins: "shri nakalanki narayanam alakhiam niricanam..."
10. In this essay, the Nizari Ismailis are meant. The Musta'ali Ismailis, another Ismaili branch, include the Bohras of India. For histories of the Ismailis, see Daftari, *The Ismailis;* Abualy A Aziz, *A Brief* History; and Marshall Hodgson, *The Secret Order of the Assassins* (Philadelphia: ...).
11. An account or my travels in Kathiawad can be found in M G Vassanji, *A Place Within: Rediscovering India* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2009; New Delhi: Penguin, 2010).
12. Some years ago, you were told at Pirana that Imamshah was the son of Hassan Kabirdeen, who was the son of Sadardeen, and so on. Now the story is that Imamshah was the son of Brahmin parents and brought up by a Muslim couple.
13. Daftari, p. 559.
14. Ibid, pp. 446, 451
15. Ibid, pp. 446, 448.
16. Ibid, p. 474.
17. I was told of a group of Khoja Ismailis in Toronto who recently invited a guru from India, apparently as a part-time spiritual guide; and of a family in Nairobi, Kenya, who invited Sai Baba.
18. On the wall of a patola workshop in Patan, I came across a much-loved ginan verse, unattributed; the same devotional verse is present in a recording of bhajans in my possession, attributed in this case, but not to a Khoja pir.
19. Daftari, p. 478.
20. Two copies of the long ginan *To Munivara Bhai* in my possession differ by one verse; there also appear what seem to me like interpolated verses that warn against the corruption of youth and taking tobacco.
21. In one Khoja village I visited, children were being given names like Ashok, and a mukhi recited abhajan in praise of Gandhi to school kids.
22. A rare occurrence of Shiva and Devi, in my experience, occurs in the ginan "Girbhavali Shastra Likhiyate, Shiv Devi Samvad," a conversation between the two deities.
23. A K Ramanujan, "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation." in *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991.
24. I have in mind a Khoja edition of the N*akalanki Gita* by Imamshah, Sadardeen's grandson, who is worshipped at Pirana.
25. It should be pointed out that Ramanujan's point of view is not without its own purist detractors, cf. http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?236875.
26. Abdulsalam Zaeef, *My Life with the Taliban*, Delhi: Hachette, 2010.

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Book Reviews

Madhu Trivedi, *The Making of the Awadh Culture,*New Delhi: Primus Books, an imprint of Ratna Sagar, 2010, Rs.1095, Pages 350

The book under review, *The Making of the Awadh Culture* by Madhu Trivedi, looks into the political anatomy of the Mughal province of Awadh that furnishes interesting facts about the overall achievement of 'Subadars', known as Nawabs. The contribution of the nawabs in making a distinct culture called "Ganga-Jamuni Tehjeeb', from the time when the sun rose in the 'suba' till it set on the horizon, is remarkable. Hence, a conscious effort will be made to supplement information to enrich the texture of the historical fabric.

Geographically the province of Awadh was unevenly divided into five 'sarkars' (districts) – Faizabad, Lucknow, Khairabad, Bahraich and Gorakhpur. In 1722, Mughal Emperor, Muhammad Shah 'Rangila' appointed his young ambitious warrior of knightly accomplishments, Saadat Khan Burhanul Mulk as the Subadar of Awadh. He was a Persian and belonged to Naishpur in Khurasan. As a matter of fact, many history books give the name of the city as Nishapur when it is actually Javelin, which in Persian is pronounced as 'Niash' and in Arabic as 'Naiza'. Hence, the city is called 'Naishpur'. Saadat Khan by his adroit manipulation of factional rivalries rose to power in the Imperial Court. However, he had to pay a very high price for his treachery, when he instigated Nadir Shah to invade Delhi in 1739. This compelled Burhan-ul-Mulk to commit suicide to save his skin.

Saadat Khan was succeeded by his nephew and son-in-law, Muhammad Muqim Abul Mansur Khan, entitled Safdar Jung in 1739, who was considered as the most powerful Mughal noble by all his contemporaries. Hence, in 1748, Emperor Ahmad Shah offered him the office of Wazir, followed by the governorship of Ajmer and the Faujdari of Narnaul. Later, he exchanged Ajmer with the suba of Allahabad, as it was contiguous to Awadh. In fact, Safdar Jung's strength lay in his vast territorial possessions, sound financial resources and a powerful military establishment. Though he was a pious Shia, was completely free from religious bigotry. All the Diwans of Awadh were mostly Hindus. The liberal trend inaugurated by the Nawab Wazir was continued by all the rulers of Awadh. Tha catholicity of religious temper of the rulers encouraged the assimilation of the two cultures – Hindu and Muslim in Awadh, which ultimately led to the evolution of a composite culture, better known as 'Ganga-Jamuni Tehjeeb'.

Safdar Jung's son and successor, Jalaluddin Haider Shujauddaula's regime stood the testimony to the violent disturbances and momentous vicissitudes in the country – the eventful third Battle of Panipat in 1761. Again in 1764, the Battle of Buxar changed the very course of history of India. Emperor Shah Alam, Shujauddaula and Mir Qasim, the Nawab of Bengal lay prostrate at the feet of the English under Robert Clive. The Treaty of Allahabad in 1765 was an important landmark in the history of India, because Shujauddaula was dragged to sign the treaty to formalize peace, friendship and union with the East India Company". Thus, the Company inserted its 'syphon' into the Nawab's treasury, which never ceased to suck. Awadh, heavily taxed and impoverished, was made to accede to final annexation in 1856. It is interesting to note that behind the veil of cooperation extended by the English towards the rulers of Awadh, lay hidden their ulterior motives, apparently meant to please the rulers, but harmful in effect. They continued to behave like termites which cankered into the body polity of Awadh in the form of annexation of the Kingdom. The impact of the Europeans on Awadh was more of a bane than a boon, because the Company played a dubious role – that of a feigning friend and a silent foe. An anonymous writer defined this 'friendship' between the English and the rulers of Awadh as a 'Fatal Friendship'.

The impact of Western influence on the rulers of Awadh had been visible since 1773, when Shujauddaula considered it a singular honour to be called the 'Vizier'

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of king of England. Further, a Frenchman J.J. Gentil, who was an advisor to Shujauddaula, wrote in his memoirs that the Nawab was a friend and protector of the French in India. But the Company never approved of the Nawab's friendship with the French. In 1775, after the Nawab was released from the toils of the Company's Government, his son and successor, Asifuddaula suffered in his stead. There is a common error in the spelling of the Nawab's name; in Persian dictionary, there is no word as 'Asaf'. Actually, the word is 'Asif', which means 'one who is highly talented'.

The English persuaded the new Nawab to ignore army reforms and to amuse himself with things that suited him best. In 1782, Asifuddaula transferred his capital from Faizabad to Lucknow, because he had to severe his relationship with his mother, Bahu Begum and grandmother, Sadrunnisa Begum, to fulfil demand of one crore and twenty lakh of Rupees, made by Warren Hastings. Apparently with the transfer of the capital, the outward splendour of Lucknow began to rise, but the administrative authority of the Nawab started waning. It was scarcely perceptible either to the Nawab or to his people that behind the smooth urbane exterior and professed concern, the shrewd imperialists were actually eating into the cankerous roots of his dominion and emptying the coffers of his ancestors.

It was with this political backdrop that Lucknow, the new capital of Awadh, gradually emerged as an epicentre of the Indo-Persian culture in the 18th and 19th centuries. Madhu Trivedi's book *The Making of the Awadh Culture* is a scholarly work on the cultural history of Awadh. She has made an incisive study into the evolution and growth of the composite culture during the Nawabi period. She has rightly pointed out that "the culture of Awadh was oriented to Persia, but from the time of Shujauddaula, European influence also became visible'. The French influence was particularly visible "in military technology and in miniature painting during his time."

Asifuddaula and Saadat Ali Khan also maintained cordial relations with the Europeans. Asifuddaula had an insatiable passion for acquisition of articles of European manufacture and preserved them in his famous 'Aina Khana'. He had acquired a number of mechanical toys, watches, chronometers, glassware and scientific instruments imported from London. A young French officer Claude Martin, who was perhaps number one in the hierarchy, surrounding the Court of the Nawab, cultivated the latter's taste for European trinkets and undertook to supply them. Once Claude Martin had experimented with flying a gas balloon, which was demonstrated to the Nawab-Wazir, but it was not successful. However, during the reign of King Nasiruddin Haider, another experiment was successfully made by an Englishman, who flew about 14 miles and descended near Chinhat in Lucknow. The King, who watched the feat from the Dilkhusha Palace, commanded his military Chief, Bakhtawar Singh to follow the balloon. When it passed from the palace, the Englishman took off his hat to salute the King, who later rewarded him.

It is interesting to note that Asifuddaula's son Wazir Ali was the first to learn English. Madhu Trivedi observes that among the rulers of Awadh, it was Saadat Ali Khan who had maximum exposure to European culture. Madam Gailliez, a French woman from Chundernagar, supervised his initial education. During his exile in Calcutta and Allahabad, Saadat Ali Khan had ample opportunities to interact with the European Society. Soon he became proficient in the language. As Ann Deane remarks "Saadat Ali Khan understood the English language perfectly and wrote it correctly, but his pronunciation was said to be faulty.1 Nasiruddin Haidar, too, had a great passion to learn the English language. William Knighton in his book *Private Life of an Eastern King*, mentions the names of five European tutors of the king. One of them was Captain Mackens, the King's bodyguard, and the other was his barber, George Harris Derusett, better known as 'The Barber of Lucknow'. The King had developed a peculiar Persian lettering, which from a distance resembled English script.2

On account of his craze for the English language, Nasiruddin Haider had established an English school and a medical college to teach the allopathic system of medicine. He even founded a King's Hospital near the Residency. Among the nobles, Tafazzul Husain, who was given the title of Sarfarazuddaula, was a profoundly learned man and the 'Alama' of the period. He was also a reputed linguist and had mastered the English language. Besides, he translated a number of English books into Arabic and Persian such as Newton's *Principia*, works of Thomas Addison, Simpson's book on Algebra and Conic Sections, Emerson's book on Mechanics, Euclid's works, and several other treatises. He was equally proficient in mathematics and astronomy.

The author has highlighted the impact of western culture on the dress, cuisine and drinks of the rulers and the elites of Awadh. During his stay in Calcutta, Saadat Ali Khan was inspired to imitate the English dress code of wearing breaches.3 At times, he appeared in the uniform of an English Admiral. According to Viscount Valentia Ghaziuddin Haider was "highly gratified by a comparison between himself and the Prince of Wales (Later King George IV). The Crown and robes used at the Coronation ceremony of Ghaziuddin Haider was of European origin. The king even imitated the English 'Court of Arms'. The famous artist, Robert Home was employed by Ghaziuddin Haider to design his crown,

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coronation robes and court of Arms, which he actually obtained from the original 'Coronation Role' of England. Similarly, king Nasiruddin Haider also behaved and dressed up as an Englishman, with the difference that he wore a crown instead of a hat, which Madhu Trivedi substaintiates in her book. However, the last three Kings of Awadh – Muhammad Ali Shah, Amjad Ali Shah and Wajid Ali Shah did not ape Europeans for they were much oriental in their attire and manners. The author mentions that 'Lucknow, was known for its sartorial styles' and introduced many new trends in dress, 'encouraged by royalty and fashionists, tailoring made unprecedented progress.'

Ghaziuddin Haider possessed an English Coach, rather like the Governor – General, lord Mayo's Coach, with a Muslim coachman in livery of the latest London fashion.4

The coins of Ghaziuddin Haider also reflected European influence. He had embossed a pair of lions on the coins apart form the original fish motif of Awadh. Later, Wajid Ali Shah had replaced the lion figures by a pair of beautiful mermaids.

The popularity of Awadhi cuisine spread its aroma to enrich Lucknow culture. 'Pan' was also offered 'in style' in Lucknow. The Nawabs and their courtiers often entertained their European guests in western style. Once a visitor at the Court of Asifuddaula is reported to have remarked "If I looked no further than the tea table, I could persuade myself, I was in London'.5 Similarly, when Saadat Ali Khan hosted a dinner in honour of Viscount Valentia, the latter remarked that the mise-en-scËne was so English – like that the guests found it difficult to believe that they were seated in the court of an Asiatic Prince. Again in 1814, Nawab Ghaziuddin Haider had entertained the Governor General, Lord Hastings, the Earl of Moira and his wife, Lady Moira in a typical English manner. Likewise, in 1831, when Nasiruddin Haider entertained a British Officer and a lady, the table was laid in perfect existing English fashion. The King was very fond of European cuisine and had even employed a French cook. He had a taste for western furniture as well.

The author has discussed in detail the growth of Shiaism in Lucknow, which was an important aspect of the cultural trait of Awadh. Emperor Akbar was particularly impressed with the Shias for their profound learning and refined taste. During the mid-eighteenth century, Shia Ulama, scholars and some elite families assembled at Faizabad under the patronage of Shujauddaula. With the transfer of the capital by Asifuddaula, Lucknow emerged as the most reputed centre of Islamic learning. Mulla Nizam-al-Din Sihalwi of the Farangi Mahal were the most outstanding Sunni scholars. On the other hand, the author observes that "under the patronage of the Nawabs there was a strengthening of the intellectual tradition which combined the rationalist scholarship of Iran, transmitted in large part in India by Fathullah Shirazi", where the emphasis was on 'Wahdat-al-Wajud'. It is interesting to note that "Not only was Indian Shia scholarship gaining ground in Awadh, the achievements of the Safavid scholars of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in rational sciences continued to be cherished and nurtured by the sunni scholars of Farangi Mahal and Khairabad". Some of the leading Shia families of Lucknow studied under them. On the other hand, some of the leading Shia scholars of the eighteenth century were the products of Farangi Mahal. The movement of Shia Scholars and other professionals from Awadh to Iran and Iraq facilitated the diffusion of Ideas and it set up a new scholarly Shia tradition in Awadh. Maulana Saiyyad Dildar Ali Nasirabadi, better known as the Ghufran Ma'ab was a renowned Shia scholar of Lucknow. Shia Law was implemented during the region of Ghaziuddin Haider, which was enforced more-vigorously by Amjad Ali Shah. The celebrations of Muharrum attained a new height since the time of Ghaziuddin Haider. But, inspite of it the rulers of Awadh subscribed to Akbar's concept of 'Sulh-i-kul' and maintained perfect religious harmony in their dominion. However, sometimes, owing to ideological differences and the observance of certain religious practices, tension broke out between the Shia and Sunni communities. But the administration always tried to control the situation as far as possible. On the contrary, there was no conflict and tension between the hindus and Shias in Lucknow.

The author has made a critical analysis of the literary activities of Lucknow as she points out that "significant development occurred in the realm of language and literature, Lucknow won acclaims for its literary culture. Frequent poetic assembles (Mussaaras) were attended by nobles and litterateurs alike. People could be seen intimately engaged in literary discourse at the residences of some courtesans of repute, who were also well versed in poetry. Inns too served as venues. Ö several popular poetic forms were developed in Lucknow, such as the 'fabti' and 'tukbandi'". (Fabti is a verse to mock or convey contempt, while tukbandi is to indulge in rhyming)

"The poetry of Lucknow was not a mere extension of Delhi School of Poetry, but assumed distinction from the very beginning as it laid its emphasis on the externals of language, the play on words, and rhetorical devices. It was much more ornate than the literary idiom of DelhiÖ The Lucknow poets were conscious of their exclusive diction and refinement of Urdu, endowing it with a Persian Veneer."

Thus, under the patronage of the rulers of Awadh,

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Lucknow blossomed as the rendezvous of a galaxy of litterateurs. Wajid Ali Shah was himself a prolific writer, who wrote poems in different verse forms under the nom de plume 'Akhtar'. There were about 700 literateurs in the employ of Wajid Ali Shah. Urdu poetry, Ghazal, Marsiya, Masnawi, Rekhti, Haja, Hasal, Wasokht, Urdu prose, Urdu Drama, Persian poetry, Persian prose and polemical literature and the like, acquired tremendous refinement under the patronage of the rulers of Awadh. Moreover, the Hindu landlords and nobles also encouraged and patronized Hindi poetry, both in Braj Bhasha and Awadhi. The 'Riti' poetic style gives emphasis on 'alankar', 'Chahnda' and 'ras'. Its language is a blend of Sanskrit, Apbhransha and Persian and the compositions are in blank verse muktaka).

Archer, an Englishman, had popularized the idea of printing press and was the first one to establish a press in Lucknow during the reign of Ghaziuddin Haider. Books like *Zad-ul-Miad, Haft Qulzum, Taj-ul-Lughat* and a dictionary were printed from this press. In due course, a rich merchant, Mustafa Khan set up the Mustafai Press, followed by Baksh Bhan's Alvi Press, where works on oriental languages, particularly on religion, 'diwans', 'tajkiras', tales and history books were printed.

Music and dance were an integral part of the cultural milieu of Awadh. These art forms were appreciated and patronized by the rulers, courtiers, the elite class and even the common populace of Awadh. It was an important source of recreation. The author has very well traced the various styles of vocal, instrumental and folk music as well as dance forms including folk dance. The author has rightly stated that the term 'gharana' appears for the first time in a music treatise of Wajid Ali Shah in the context of dance. The King was also responsible for the development of 'musical historiography' in Awadh. He himself compiled a number of musical treatises in Persian and Urdu such as *Saut-al-Mubarak* and *Pari Khana* in Persian. Actually, *Pari Khana* is one of the chapters of Wajid Ali Shah's autobiography, *Mahal Khana Shah*. He also wrote four books on music in Urdu – '*Bani*', '*Najo*', '*Chanchal-nazneen*' and *Dulhan*. These works provides us an insight into the performing traditions of the period, particularly, the court techniques, court musicians, and the various experiments of Wajid Ali Shah in the realm of music and dance.

The author has also referred to a particular style of somber music, known as 'Soz-khwani' and "marsiya-Khwani', which is primarily associated with the rituals of muharram. In this style the emphasis is given more on the rhythm and it never accompanied by instruments. In Lucknow, marsiya is recited in a set style and is never based on any rag and ragini. But Soz is invariably rendered in rag 'Bhairvi Thaat', 'Khwani' and 'Khambaj' and 'Tilk Kamod'. In Lucknow Mia Shoric took Soz-Shoric took Soz-Khwani to a great heights.

Wajid Ali Shah is also famous as the founder of Urdu Drama in Lucknow. The first Urdu play, *Radha Kanhhiayya Ka Qissa*, was written and directed by the King himself and it was staged by his 'paris' in the Rahas Manzil at the Qaisar bagh Complex. These 'Jalsas' were confined to elitist class only. Besides, *Radha Kanhhaiyya Ka Qissa*, Wajid Ali Shah had written and produced three more 'Rahas' – 'Dariya-i-Tashhuq', 'Bahr-i-ulfat' and 'Afsana-i-Ishq' and were staged in Qasiar Bagh complex. Later, Syed Agha Hasan Amanat wrote a play, 'indarsabha' and it was first read in front of the common audience at Mansoornagar in July 1851 and finally it was staged in Janjary, 1852. Amanat's 'Indarsabha' provided all round entertainment to the public and it was a belnd of folk and classical forms. This new form of dance drama became very popular and it led to the birth of urban theatre in Lucknow towards the middle of the nineteenth century.

The author has given a critical assessment of the development of a distinct style of painting and calligraphic art in the chapter entitled 'Awadh Painting'. From the point of view of the theme, style and technique, Awadh Painting may be divided into two categories: the later Mughal Court art with certain characteristics borrowed from Rajput paintings, and the influence of European style. The European influence on the paintings of Awadh originated in the reign of Shujauddaula under J.J. Gentil and Autome Louis Henry Polier, "who not only demanded the delineation of themes in a naturalistic manner, but took care of the technique and the colour palette as well." Nawab Safdar Jung was a great connoisseur of painting and had an excellent collection of Mughal miniatures. Eminent artists of Delhi like Faizullah Khan and others produced an enormous number of miniatures for him. Similarly, Asifuddaulah had employed Johann Zaffany, a renowned artist, with a handsome salary. Robert homes, whose artistic sill was highly acclaimed by bishop Heber and Muntz, adorned the courts of Ghaziuddin Haider and Nasiruddin Haider respectively. Muntz had painted a number of masterpieces of Nasiruddin Haider in his English attire as well as in his native costumes. The European impact was also visible on the works of local artists.

Rcently a rare oval shaped oil-on-canvas painting of King Ghaziuddin Haider by Robert Home was discovered by a London Art dealer, Philip Mould, at an auction in London.6 This portrait reveals interesting facts about the King. The building in the background appears to be the rear view of the Rumi Darwaza, with the Bara Imambara entrance on the left hand side. The chair on which the King is seated, appears to be the one used by

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his ancestor asifuddaula, because the same type of chair was painted by Johann Zaffany, an artist of that period. The Bara Imambara may also signify, Ghaziuddin Haider's role as a champion of the Shia faith in Awadh.

Calligraphy was treated as a form of art, which was used for decorative purposes. After his exile in Persia, when Humayun returned to India, he was accompanied by the master calligraphers of Persia. They improvised the art of inscriptional writing and mural calligraphy to such a level of perfection as reflected in the Taj Mahal. The religious buildings of Awadh, particularly of Lucknow, are decorated with splendidly executed calligraphic inscriptions of Quaranic verses in the traditional 'Naskh' style and innovative designs of 'Tughra'. It is 'specially structured to depict the attributes of 'Allah' or the titles of an Imam as a logo. Chronograms in Urdu or Persian provided information of the build and the year of construction in a 'Taareekh', lyrically composed or recorded in prose, were also affixed as a 'Katba', at some significant point of the structure. Some of the beautiful calligraphic styles are to be seen in Bara Imambara, Husainabad Imambara, Karabala of Kazmain etc.

The author has vividly traced the emergence of a new style of architecture in Awadh. It truly represents the aesthetic aspirations and socio-religious requirements of the rulers as well as the urban elites. The decoration of buildings are ornate in style with mouldings in plaster stucco work. The nawabi architecture of Lucknow also mirrored the European influence. Shujauddaula had appointed a Frenchman named Antonio Polier as a court architect, who had designed the fort of Faizabad. Polier came to Lucknowalong with Asifuddaula. Another Frenchman Claude Martin established a strong friendly bond with Asifuddaula and Saadat Ali Khan and helped them to develop a taste for the European architecture. Gradually, the Lucknow style of architecture acquired its own identity, which was a perfect melange of the later Mughal and the European styles. The rulers of Awadh were fascinated by the Baroque, the Palladian and the Geothic styles. The rulers of Awadh were fascinated by the Baroque, the Palladian and the Goethic styles. The Dilkhusha Palace was an exact replica of Seaton Delavel, an English building designed by Sir Johan Vanburgh in Northamber land. The 'Kankar Wali Kothi' and 'Nur Baksh Kothi' were built in the Italian style. Kifaitullah had design Bara Imambara, which is a unique architectural feat in the world.

Another important feature of the Nawabi architecture is that the buildings are laid out in conjunction with gardens. The gardens were laid out in the Mughal Chahar-Bagh pattern, square in shape and surrounded by high walls pierced with lofty gateways and a magnificent pavilion in the middle. Instead of running water channels of Mughal style, Awadh gardens had a raised tank in the centre, inserted with numerous fountains. Lucknow was also famous for its parks and beautiful gardens e.g. Sikandrabagh, Lalbagh, Banarasibagh, Charbagh, Nazarbagh, Khurshidbagh, Alambagh, Badshah bagh, Chand bagh and the like. On account of its enchanting gardens, Lucknow was known as 'Paris of the East'.

It is significant to note that the rulers of Awadh were environment conscious. Their buildings were eco-friendly. The baolis and tanks served the purpose of rain harvesting. All round green belt and several gardens maintained perfect ecological balance in the capital.

The last chapter of the book is an interesting account of 'Industrial Art', i.e. the art and crafts of Awadh. Most of the excellent handicraft of Awadh had declined after the annexation of the Kingdom in 1856. But some of them are still continuing and are appreciated even in the home market, e.g. Chikankari and Zardozi work. Awadh produced extremely refined and skilled craftsmen, who were simply exquisite in their craftsmanship, whether it was chikankari, Zardozi work, shoe embroidery, kashmiri embroidery, minakari, wire drawing and wire working and at same time, there were craftsmen who were adept in gold and silver work including filigree ornaments, kandan kari, Lac and Guit work, copper and brassware, jewellery, ivory carving, ornamental tents and canopy making, clay work and wood work. The silver and gold Varaq' used for decreasing sweatmeats and wrapping pan, nuts cardamom etc. were specialities of Lucknow. It is said that the 'bidri work was introduced in Lucknow by Asifuddaula, who had invited expert craftsmen of damascening from Hyderabad and Murshidabad.

Textile was one of the biggest industries of Awadh. Superior quality of cotton fabrics were produced in Tanda, Rai Bareli and Jais. A large number of people were engaged in weaving, dyeing printing and the glazing of calicoes.

Lucknow and Bahraich manufactured paper of coarse quality. The author has given details of this industry.

'Taziya' or replicas of the tombs of Imam Husain, Imam Hasan and other kinsmen and followers were extensively manufactured in Lucknow during Muharram. The manufacturing of 'Taziyas' was an intricating art, which the craftsmen of Lucknow had specialized. 'Taziyas' were made of paper, silver, ivory, ebony, sandal wood, cedar, glass and wax.

The kite and 'manzha' making was also a flourishing industry of Lucknow. Different types of kites were made, which required a lot of technical skill. Similarly, thread

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and 'manzha' were prepared with special technique. The kite flying was a popular mode of outdoor recreation for all classes of populace of Lucknow.

To sum up it can be said that in the Nineteenth century, the cultural fabric of Awadh owes its richness, exquisite beauty and myriads of colours to the prevailing literary milieu of the period; progressive development in music; painting, architecture, industrial art and of course the renowned 'Ganga'Jamuni Tahzeeb' that symbolized the confluence of Persian aesthetics and Indian cultural values. Further, the lakhnavi secular way of salutation 'Adab' and the fish motive brought to the limelight, a distinct character of this composite culture.

It is this cultural panorama of Awadh that the author Madhu Trivedi has spotlighted the vividly delineated in this excellent monograph. This well researched work is indeed a significant and valuable contribution to the realm of knowledge and could be apt spring board for further researches in socio-economic and cultural history. The presentation of the book is praiseworthy. The lucid and convincing language makes the book all the more, an interesting reading.

Notes

1. Ann Deane, *A Tour Through the Upper provinces of Hindustan*, (London, 1823), p.103.
2. K.B. Saiyyad Aba Muhammad, 'Some Autographs of King Nasir-ud-Haider', *Journal of the U.P. Historical Society*, Vol. I, 12 July, 1939, pp. 40-48.
3. Major Edward C. Archer, *Tours in Upper India and in parts of the Himalayan Mountains with an account of the Courts of the native princes*, Vol. I (London 1833), p.17.
4. Fredrick John Shore, *Notes on Indian Affairs*, Vol. I, (London 1837), p.83.
5. *Journal of Indian History*, No. 45, Vol. II, August 1967, pp. 582-607.
6. 'Lucknow Times' the *Hindustan Times*, 15 June, 2010

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Syed Anwarul Haque Haqqi, *Chingiz Khan : The Life and Legacy of An Empire Builder*, New Delhi: Primus Books, 2010, pp.xxx+326, Rs.995.

In general perception, Chingiz Khan (1155-1227) has been regarded as a blood-thirsty monster who, during the course of his invasions in different parts of Asia, massacred thousands of people and destroyed scores of flourishing cities. In the process, he is alleged to have wiped out the finest elements of Islamic civilization which had risen to great heights in the previous centuries. The contemporary writers, both of the East and West, portrayed him in lurid colours that have always roused feelings of horror and disgust. The book under review (which has grown out of a doctoral thesis prepared under the guidance of eminent historian Mohammad Habib) demolishes the stereotypes about Chingiz Khan and examines his achievements in the context of his times as well as his long-term legacy. Our author, Haqqi, is clear about his objectives. He aims at exploring those aspects of Chingiz Khan's career that have been hitherto overlooked viz. trials of early life, conduct as a man, achievements as a military general and contribution as an administrator and legislator.

We learn that Chingiz Khan was born in the house of a tribal chief, who belonged to the Borjigin clan of the Mongols and headed 40,000 households. He was brought up in the harsh nomadic life which was characterized by constant migration in search of suitable pastures for herds of cattle. During his youth, he was pushed into adversity owing to the death of his father and desertion of his relatives. While struggling for sheer survival, he employed the tribal concept of 'sworn friend' (anda) in order to win over influential potentates. Gradually, he succeeded in subjugating such tribes as Taichiuts, Naimans, Merkits, Tatars and Jurkis. At the same time, he forged alliances with a number of tribes (e.g. Ovirat and Qinqurat) and integrated them with his own people. He benefited from an uneasy alliance with the Kereits, a Turkish tribe that dominated the riverine tract along the Great Wall. The chief of the Kereits, Toghril Khan (Wang Khan), treated Chingiz Khan as the 'elder brother of his son.' As the ambition of Chingiz Khan to create an empire in the steppes became evident, eleven tribes formed a confederacy against him. Chingiz Khan scattered the confederacy and defeated the powerful alliance of Toghril Khan and Jamuka Sechen (the chief of Jajirat clan of Mongols). His expedition against China forced the Kin emperor to sue for peace, transfer his capital from Yenking to Pyeni Iyang and finally to poison himself. At the end of a decade of warfare and conciliation, Chingiz Khan was accepted as the Khaqan (Khan of Khans) by a grand assembly (quriltai) of subject tribes. This momentous event, which occurred in 1206, coincided with the foundation of the Delhi Sultanate in north-western India as an autonomous state.

Haqqi shows that the emergence of the Mongol Empire was inseparably linked with Chingiz Khan's elaborate military campaign against the Khwarazmian Empire, which extended from the Jaxartes in the east to the Persian Gulf in the west. On the one hand, Haqqi describes a series of Mongol invasions against Khwarazm and, on the other, uncovers the political and military weaknesses of this kingdom. It is true that Sultan Alauddin Khwarazm Shah

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ruled over extensive territories and had succeeded in inflicting a major defeat on the Ghorids at Andkhud, yet he failed to consolidate the foundations of his power and authority. The undue domination of his mother, Turkan Khatun, caused much internal conflict. His administration was oppressive, while his vassals were rebellious. The Shah's opposition to the caliph al-Nasir and alliance with the Qarakhitais generated widespread resentment on theological grounds. He ordered the execution of some merchants and envoys sent by Chingiz Khan and, thus, brought an avoidable calamity on his kingdom. Failing to anticipate the consequences of his provocative and undiplomatic actions, he failed to make any preparations during the next two years. Instead of taking a firm military stand on the Jaxartes (as suggested by his son Jalaluddin Mangbarni), he ordered his troops to withdraw into the forts that were located in the different parts of his kingdom. One after the other, Chingiz Khan overran the prominent cities of Transoxiana and Khurasan - Utrar, Bukhara, Samarqand, Merv, Nishapur and Herat. These urban centres were devastated, inhabitants were massacred, artisans were captured and Mongol superintendents (shahnas) were imposed. Relentlessly pursued across west Asia, Sultan Alauddin took shelter in an island of the Caspian Sea, where he died in utter frustration. The Mongols followed up their success by overrunning Azerbaijan and Georgia, even reaching as far as Caucasus. On the eastern front, the Mongols chased Jalaluddin Mangbarni (the Khwarazmian prince) beyond the Indus and occupied several Ghorid forts viz. Kalim, Fiwar, Firozkoh, Tulak and Saifrud. Returning to Mongolia after seven years of ceaseless warfare, Chingiz Khan chastised the ruler of Tangut for refusing to join the operations against Khwarazm.

Haqqi takes considerable pains to demonstrate that Chingiz Khan was not only a gifted military leader, but he was also a creative genius. This significant aspect of the conqueror was reflected in the organization of his army and civil administration. The army was structured on the decimal-cum-appanage system which ensured simplicity and efficiency. Every officer was accountable to his immediate superior, while none could desert the ranks. During the march, the army was segmented into seven divisions. It covered long distances at tremendous speed (200 miles in a single day) and bore great physical hardship. During an offensive, it relied on the elements of surprise, deception and terror. It often took recourse to flight and suddenly turned back to deliver the final assault. Its most decisive tactic lay in flanking cavalry units (tulughma) that penetrated the rear of the enemy. In contrast to other medieval armies, the Mongol army could separate itself from the person of the monarch and attacked different targets at the same time. An elite guard, which comprised ten thousand (tuman) soldiers, performed multifarious duties and virtually constituted the household of Chingiz Khan.

Our author explores the multiple dimensions of the Mongol polity, which served the needs of a vast empire (extending from the Chinese Wall to the Caspian Sea) as well culturally diverse social groups, both nomadic and settled. The sovereign ruler, who was addressed as Khaqan, was elected by a general assembly (quriltai) of subject tribes. Besides the core areas administered by the Khaqan, his sons governed appanages as autonomous kingdoms. Neither military nor feudal, the Mongol Empire closely resembled a 'family corporation'. The ruling elite was bound to follow the supreme law of the land (yassa) which, to begin with, drew largely from the Mongol customs, but later acquired interpolations from Christianity and Islam. Laying down regulations varying from the conduct of war to the mode of cow slaughter, it immortalized the figure of Chingiz Khan and conferred legitimacy on his descendants. With a view to consolidate his authority and hold together his followers, Chingiz Khan claimed a semi-divine status. In the process, he engineered a merger of state and religion by institutionalizing the post of the chief Shaman (beki). A hereditary nobility was absent, though a favoured elite (tarkhans) enjoyed special privileges for nine generations. The horse post system (yam) linked the far flung parts of the Mongol Empire, besides contributing to a slow and silent process of cultural fusion. Absolute religious toleration was practiced and theologians of all creeds were exempted from taxes.

Haqqi rightly feels that the emergence of the Mongol Empire could not be grasped without a fair understanding of the Mongol society. Therefore, he delves into the social structure and social mores, paying adequate attention to the role of women. We learn that the Mongol society was constituted by several tribes and clans. The descendants of a common ancestor - along with their families, dependants and slaves - formed a tribe or clan. Since polygamy was not sufficient to replenish the fighting strength, a clan resorted to adoption (blood brothership) or incorporation of other clans. Sometimes the tribes converged to form a confederation, while these unions were sealed by oaths and rituals. Since the Mongols always moved in search of fresh pastures, they lived in movable dwellings (yurts) that were carried in large wagons and pulled by several pairs of oxen. Their favourite beverage was fermented mare's milk (kumiz). They consumed the meat of all animals and, during the winter months, ate dried flesh. Their apparel was made of leather and fur. The dead were buried along with the goods loved by them. Religion was free from dogma and

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priesthood, but reverence was shown towards natural objects.

Haqqi asserts that the women enjoyed a respectable status in the Mongol society. Hard working and laborious, they performed a wide range of tasks from tending cattle to driving carts. They were devoted and loyal to their husbands. The direct relation between the need for a large progeny and the prevailing polygamous practices inevitably caused hierarchy among women and concubines. Women were inherited by successors like other forms of property. Women, who were abducted in war, were distributed among the victorious and, soon after, could be remarried or pushed into concubinage. Marriage ceremony did not include any prayer or sacrifice. The union, which was sealed by purchase or bargain, often acquired the semblance of force and violence. Conjugal rights were determined on the basis of possession and not mere claims. Political conflicts among the tribes were often resolved by strategic marriages. In spite of these customs, sexual morality among the Mongols was higher as compared to the Persians and Chinese. It is interesting to note that two women, mother (Oyelun) and wife (Bortei), played a crucial role in promoting the political career of Chingiz Khan. However, it is not clear as to why he bestowed one of his wives (Ibaha) on a leading commander (Jurchidai) as a reward for 'inestimable service.'

Haqqi does not confine himself to describing the military and administrative achievements of Chingiz Khan. Instead, he also examines the long-term consequences of the formation of the Mongol Empire on the history of Eurasia. At the same time, he seeks to wash the stains of cruelty that have been repeatedly affixed on the personality of Chingiz Khan. Haqqi endeavours to achieve these objectives by highlighting the personal virtues of Chingiz Khan, by placing his actions in the appropriate historical context and by comparing him with great generals who had earned abiding fame for their conquests. Haqqi asserts that Chingiz Khan possessed several qualities of head and heart. The Mongol empire-builder was a respectable family man, who was deeply attached to his kith and kin. He took a keen interest in the welfare of his followers, who were often loaded with lavish awards. Being an excellent judge of men, he did not hesitate to appreciate the bravery among his enemies. It is true that his military outlook was combined with the instinct of acquisition. He was thoughtful in planning and methodical in approach, but never capricious or heartless. For him, cruelty on the battlefield was a military necessity, as it was calculated to strike terror in the enemy and to make him surrender. After all, he represented the customs of the nomadic tribes of the steppes. As a military commander, he was quite different from Alexander and Timur, but bore similarities with Napoleon. Starting from a scratch, he transformed the warring Mongol tribes first into a standing army and then into an empire. He not only invited Chang Chun (the famous Taoist philosopher of China) to his court, but also sought his advice on governmental maters.

Our author believes that an objective assessment of Chingiz Khan's achievements can be made by examining the long term impact of his policies and actions. For example, the demise of Chingiz Khan did not have an adverse impact on the areas under his rule. It was true that the unity of the Mongol Empire was undermined by vastness of territorial expanse, cultural diversity of the subject peoples and weakening ties of blood relationships. As a result of the inevitable fragmentation, the appanages emerged as independent and sovereign states. Though the development seemed to dilute the imperial principle, yet it proved a blessing as the alien Mongol rulers were absorbed in the mainstream of local culture. The regions, which had earlier been the victims of Mongol ferocity, began to experience economic growth. Thus, Chingiz Khan is understood to have left a legacy which, while forming the basis of the Mongol rule, consisted of five principles (Mongol Panchsheel) - abolition of the hereditary system of monarchy and aristocracy, enforcement of justice, rule of law, religious tolerance and opening of public offices for men of ability. Taking a long term view, it is possible to suggest that the formation of the Mongol Empire contributed to perceptible progress in material and cultural life. The Mongols patronized the development of art, science and literature. Though they had conquered Persia, yet they were themselves won over by the Persian culture. They opened up China to the outer world and carried the technological devices of the Islamic lands to Europe. In the political realm, they paved the way for three major historical developments - establishment of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of Timur and the foundation of the Mughal Empire under Babur.

The book under review is quite relevant to the students of medieval Indian history, because the emergence of the Delhi Sultanate cannot be understood without taking into account the Mongol presence in north-western India. Let us recall that Chingiz Khan pursued the Khwarazmian prince Jalaluddin Mangbarni across the Indus. The fear of the Mongols prevented the ruler of Delhi Sultanate, Shamsuddin Iltutmish, from offering shelter to Mangbarni, who was forced to fight hard for a precarious existence in Multan and Sindh. Throughout the thirteenth century, the Mongols constituted a serious threat to the fledgling Delhi Sultanate. On the one hand, the Mongols occupied parts of Punjab up to the Beas and patronized several disgruntled nobles of the Delhi Sultanate. On the other hand, they led frequent predatory raids across the

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Punjab plains and even penetrated as far as Delhi. They also exercised their control over the Qarlughs, who had carved out their own kingdom that extended across both sides of the Indus. In view of these developments, the Delhi Sultanate was constrained to divert its resources to defend the north-western frontier against the Mongol onslaught. What is more significant, the widespread Mongol depredations in different parts of Asia forced a large number of Muslim refugees to migrate and settle in the towns of north-western India. This migration, largely slow and silent, contributed to the cultural fusion that marked the history of the Delhi Sultanate. The present volume promises to provide insights into the nature of Mongol intervention in north-western India.

While concluding this review, we may look at some distinctive features of the book. In a detailed appendix, the author analyses the major primary sources on which the book is based. This portion encompasses the writings of Minhaj-i-Siraj Juzjani, Alauddin Ata Malik Juwaini, Rashiduddin Fazlullah, Hamdullah Mustaufi, Abdullah bin Fazlullah, Ibnul Asir and Ibn Khaldun. It also includes a discussion on the merits of a significant Sino-Mongol chronicle entitled The Secret History of the Mongol Dynasty. However, it does not include a critique on the observations of travellers - Plano Carpini, Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta and Meng Hung - who have provide valuable evidence on our subject. The book contains seven historical maps, which complement the text in several meaningful ways. Last but not least, the publisher (Primus Books) has done a tremendous job in producing a beautiful volume, which is sure to benefit the students of medieval history.

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Meera Nanda, *The God Market: How globalization is making India more Hindu*, Noida: Random House, 2009, pp.241, Rs 395

In recent years there has been resurgence of different kinds of literature about globalization and its impact on Indian society. Globalization as multifaceted phenomenon creates a world of uneven development on the one hand and constructs certain kinds of ideological commitments to sharpen the tendencies of religious and fundamentalist beliefs on the other. It also creates the political religiosity, coupled with Hindu majoritarianism. In this connection, Meera Nanda, a well known researcher in the domains of secularism, philosophy of science and social and political history of contemporary practices of religious institutions in India, has contributed more than six monographs in the intensely debated and contested areas of inter-disciplinary research. Her latest book on *The God Market: How globalization is making India more Hindu* is a welcome addition to the research on secularism and generates a debate on globalization and its internal ideological connections with religiosity and its overall impact on the very fabric of Indian society. She has critical capacity to articulate her perspective and arguments lucidly. The theoretical issues and philosophical debates, she is trying to engage with in this book under review, is one of the most contentious terrains within contemporary scholarship, where she is trying to critically examine the ideology of globalization and its political and social consequences for Indian public institutions, and how, over the years these institutions of collective democratic responsibility have witnessed radical changes and became more globalised in terms of Hindutva ideology. However, these rationalist and secularist concerns over globalization and its linkages with fundamentalism and political religiosity have been the subject matter of curious debate between modernist and post-modernist scholarship. They articulate and problematise these aspirations from different canons. of rationality and efficacy of scientific temperament in the making of Indian society a more dynamic and egalitarian one. But they hardly reach out for any consensus on these issues in their quest for meanings and roots of religiosity in understanding the meaning and role of globalization in India.

In this book the author has deconstructed the narrative of 'us' and 'them' and tried to show; how India is not free from politicized religiosity which manifests itself in a growing sense of Hindu majoritarianism. Indeed, globalization is making the entire world more religious-and all religions more political and though they are drawing closer economically, people all over the world are becoming more self-conscious of their religious and civilizational heritage. She reiterates that globalization has been good for gods-and often, sadly for gods' warriors as well who incite conflicts and violence in the name of their faith. And India is no exception to this global trend.

In exploring the dimensions of religiosity in the times of globalization, the author intends to capture the trends and changing texture of everyday expressions of Hinduism analyzing the larger political, economic and institutional shifts, which India is experiencing as it emerges as a 'major' player in global economy and world politics. In order to substantiate her arguments, she refers to the patterns of migration from India, how people migrate with their religiosity and god to the host culture and assert their identity in a more vigorous manner simultaneously making use of new opportunities opened

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up by neo-liberalization and globalization. Similar kind of argument one finds in Arjun Appadurai's book *Modernity At Large*, but the focus is on cultural identity: there is also Wittgensteinian family resemblance in both conceptual and theoretical categories dealing with cultural and religious identities.

In this book, the author has tried to underline certain assumptions about religious freedom and freedom of expression at two levels. The first relates with the role of the Indian state in dealing with questions of secularism on the one hand and its multifaceted commitments towards making of Indian polity, egalitarian and democratic one on the other. Another interesting argument Meera presents in her book is the role of 'state' as an institution of collective responsibility towards its people. She shows in her analysis that, the state is developing a very intriguing kind of connection between Hindu nationalists, and corporate complexes. To explain this, she uses a beautiful phrase and it reads as 'the State - Temple- Corporate Complex and the Banality of Hindu Nationalism' (108). The phrase itself explains how the recent spade of globalization had turned the Indian society more religious and intolerant in its outlook towards the other sections of society specifically the minority community.

According to Meera educated Indians in cities and small towns are becoming more religious than the less educated villagers. Another startling fact she highlights is the apathy of Indian state towards its education and public health, 'India has 2.5 million places of worship but only 1.5 millions schools and barely 75000 hospitals, Rajasthan government spent 260 million rupees for temple renovation and training 600 Hindu priests. several other researched documents she refers to give detailed account of globalization and its consequences for Indian polity.

The book is divided into six chapters including: 'India and the Global Economy : A Very Brief Introduction,' 'The Rush Hour of the Gods : Globalization and Middle-class Religiosity,' 'The State-Temple-Corporate Complex and the Banality of Hindu Nationalism,' 'India@superpower.com : How We See Ourselves' and 'Rethinking Secularization.' Each chapter deals with different aspects of globalization, its surface and deep grammar concerning political religiosity and its meanings for equity and political equality. Each chapter of the book offers a fresh insight and critique of globalization, how over the years the promise of Indian constitution is taking back seat and certain political and social ideals of liberal secular humanism advocated by Nehru and Ambedkar are being derailed day in and day out.

In the process of unpacking these recurrent themes of the book the author offers descriptive as well explanatory accounts to substantiate her arguments. For instance, she emphasizes that the book opens and closes with two big ideas, namely, globalization and secularism. She provides a brief economic history of globalization and how it impinges on freedom of marginal citizens on the one hand and creates religious middle class on the other. Another set of issues, that she brings to the fore concerns shrinking of egalitarian public spaces and how the texture of public sphere is becoming more distinctively Hindu than ever before. The author looked at India's experience of secularism through the prism of social theories of secularization and de-secularisation. In this part she crafted an interesting argument to explain, why the god market has continued to boom under peculiarly Indian brand of secularism and why it is flourishing under neo-liberal economic reforms.

In contextualizing the debates on globalization and its impact on social and political aspects of human freedom, Meera emphasizes that as India is going through the process of liberalization and the economy of the country experiences a rising tide of popular Hinduism, which is leaving no social segment and public institution untouched, there is upsurge in popular religiosity in the rising conciseness of Hindu middle class. Subsequently there is a great danger to Indian secularism from these mobile middle class compradors; therefore, there is a need to rethink about the onslaught of globalization and its implications for Indian secular polity.

Needless to mention Meera is precise in her linguistic expression about social and political events and her arguments about secular polity. Her views are cogent and clear that fascinate the reader to read the book, in a more cohesive manner, without losing interest in the complexity of the argument. She presents her arguments from the rationalist and modernist perspective that at times create discomfort to those who are not in consonance with rationalist arguments.

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